

Embodying Liberatory Education:  
The Values and Hopes of Asian Non-Binary and Women Movement Makers

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A dissertation  
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2023

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

College of Education

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**Abstract**

The Values and Hopes of Asian Non-binary and Women Movement Makers:

Towards a Liberatory Education

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Asian movement makers (organizers, community educators, artists, and healers) engaged in liberatory movement spaces continue to teach the next generation through modeling action, hosting educational workshop, engaging activist through art, and providing support and care for their communities. Therefore, much can be learned from Asian movement makers' values and hopes to create sustaining and liberatory learning spaces across settings. In this dissertation, I seek to answer the following research questions: 1) How do we create chosen, culturally sustaining learning spaces that are grounded in the values and hopes of Asian movement makers (organizers, community educators, artists, and healers)? 2) How might this inform the design of transformational and liberatory learning spaces across settings for Asian youth? Utilizing surveys, one-on-one interviews, focus group sessions, and reflective arts-based narrative methods, I learned with and from 12 Asian movement makers in Seattle that 1) their politics were informed by their personal experiences 2) their commitments were to intergenerational and intersectional care, and that they seek a liberatory world that allows for refusal and exercising of choice, and the normalization of safety and joy. I conclude this study with pedagogical and curricular implications informed by the 12 Asian movement makers' values and hopes. I call for

educators and scholars across learning settings to embody liberatory politics and to create and lean on a constellation of care, or a culturally sustaining community network. These learnings from the movement makers can inform a liberatory education that is culturally sustaining and humanizing to Asian learners in community and school spaces.

**Dedication**

To my political, blood, and chosen ancestors, and to my political, blood, and chosen descendants.

For the liberation of all.

## **Acknowledgments**

There are so many folks who have contributed to me making it through my graduate studies. I'm grateful to have shared in refuge, creations, and joy with my community.

To my advisor, Dr. Shaneé Washington: I'm so grateful for you and all your time, energy, and support. You have set the standard for what an amazing advisor looks like. From the countless hours of providing supportive feedback, multiple letters of recommendation written, abundant opportunities offered, and the consistent and loving support and encouragement, I am forever grateful. Thank you also to my incredibly supportive committee: Dr. Django Paris, Dr. Jondou Chase Chen, and Dr. LeiLani Nishime. It's been an honor to learn with each of you. Thank you for role modeling the type of educator, mentor, and person I strive to be. I continue to learn with and from each of you.

I have deep appreciation for all my mentors beyond the field of education as well—primarily within Social Work and Ethnic Studies. My work continues to be influenced by you and your advocacy of interdisciplinary work.

Thank you to the AsianCrit Collective and the Critical Conversations Collective whom I've found a space to learn more about myself and my communities. I'm thankful to know what it feels like to be cared for, to be pushed in necessary, sometimes uncomfortable, and safe ways, and for the love and joy I'm surrounded by.

Thank you to the Black Leaders research study community partners who have supported me with my first research study. My learning and politics shifted towards abolition, collective care, and dreaming other worlds from the time we've spent together. I continue to carry with me the lessons I've learned from you all in my personal and professional life. I'm so grateful to continue to be in loving relationships with each of you.

Thank you to my family, friends, and loved ones for grounding me, for your patience, and for rooting for me. Special shoutout to Mom and Dad for the endless care, patience, and home cooked food.

Thank you to the AsianCrit Movement Makers. I'm continuously in awe and inspired by you and your deep commitments to community and liberation. I am incredibly honored to have met you all and learn about what you care about and dream of. I'm looking forward to all the ways we collaborate and celebrate each other.

I'm honored to have such a deep constellation of care that have guided, supported and (sometimes had to drag) me towards this point. I appreciate y'all for holding me with grace and space to continue growing.

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## **Introduction**

### *Background*

Asian American resistance movement makers have a long legacy of pushing towards liberation on a local, national, and global scale. For example, when Chinese youth were not allowed in schools in the late 1800s, Chinese communities started the first Chinese Heritage School in San Francisco (Liu, 2014). During World War II, Asian communities alongside other Communities of Color led movements against the war and engaged in transnational solidarity (Maeda, 2009). Further, Asian movement makers also have a history of mobilizing against police brutality, deportation, and racial profiling in our communities and others (Man, 2020).

Throughout this research study, I define liberation as the freedom from all forms of oppression and for individuals and communities to have access to agency and sustenance of joy, well-being, safety, and hope. Further, Fujino and Rodriguez (2022) explain that liberation must include cross-racial, transnational, and intersectional solidarity. Asian movement makers' resistance and refusal of complicity in white supremacy and colonialism, and their creation and sustenance of spaces of safety, community, and joy has existed through their political organizing, community education, art, and healing practices.

In addition to passing down critical knowledges of agency and bridging love for our communities into action, many Asian American movement makers also are passing down the knowledges of our ancestors, from plant medicine, to languages, and art ((Lu, 2020; MacDonald, 2023; The SEAD Project, 2019). These are folks who are teaching liberatory education through modeling action, expression, relationships, and caregiving. Movements for Asian liberation continue, and legacies of critical education are carried on generation to generation through the pedagogy and curricula, as a move for survival and thrivance in community learning spaces. More specifically, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and curricula exist “wherever education

sustains the lifeways of communities who have been and continue to be damaged and erased through schooling” (p.1). Such spaces exist across the nation, including Seattle.

From 1860s to today, Asian Americans in Seattle have continued to resist white supremacy through their organizing, art, healing practices, and other forms of critical education. Movement spaces like Chinatown/International District (CID) Coalition are currently fighting displacement of the neighborhood residents by the expansion of rapid transit. Further, community organizations like Anakbayan South Seattle are part of an international anti-imperialist movement fighting against the oppressive US-backed Duterte regime in the



*Figure 1 Artwork by CID Coalition advocating against displacement of CID residents.*

Philippines. While many movement spaces operate in person, virtual movement spaces have also provided sustaining learning spaces for Asian youth, including Desi Rainbow Parents and Allies, who aim to educate and support families of queer and trans Desi youth. In these spaces, folks are modeling taking action, hosting educational workshops, engaging in art activism, and addressing harm Asian communities and youth have experiences through group healing circles, mutual aid, cooking and sharing medicinal foods, and protecting one another from COVID.

### *Purpose*

As Asian led movement spaces continue the legacies of liberatory education for Asian youth, these pedagogies and curricula have not been made mainstream yet in K-12 schools and other community learning spaces (e.g., museums, non-profits, grass roots organizations, etc.). Within these movement spaces are organizers, community educators, healers, and artists, each of whom engage in teaching and learning of liberatory education. Each play a vital role in the movement towards liberation. Based on Iyer's (2020) Social Change Map, organizers can be considered "builders" or folks who "develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service of a collective vision" (p.6). They bring people together to work towards social change through modeling action and raising awareness about particular social issues. This might look like planning and hosting a protest or teach-in. Further, I consider community educators as folks who are teaching outside of a school context. Community educators, for example, may look like folks who host free workshops addressing issues impacting their communities. Additionally, Iyer also defines healers as community members who "recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices" (p.6). Further, healers also teach us how to care for ourselves and one another. Healers may be therapists, acupuncturists, or street medics, for example. Lastly, artists are critical to movements towards liberation. James Baldwin stated that "The role of the artists is exactly the same as the role of the lover. If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don't see" (Baldwin, Standley & Pratt, 1989, p.156). Baldwin names the importance of artists as social justice educators. It's important to note that these Asian led movement spaces, the spaces in which organizers, community educators, artists, and healers cultivate, are chosen spaces (Moore & Paris, 2021), or spaces where community members "choose to participate in

and have the agency to refuse their membership in” (p.21). In other words, these are learning spaces are where youth opt into. These movement makers are enacting and passing down liberatory education.

Concurrently, there is a lack of empirical studies focused on Asian organizers, community educators, healers, and artists in an Asian led movement space. While the purpose of this research study was originally to learn about the pedagogical practices of how Asian movement makers pass down liberatory knowledges, I decided to take a step back and think about their experiences, values, and hopes that inform their pedagogical practices. Therefore, the updated purpose of my dissertation research was to learn about the experiences, values, and the hopes of Asian movement makers, encompassing organizers, community educators, artists, and healers who are invested in Asian communities in Seattle to inform a curriculum that is culturally sustaining for Asian students in and outside classroom settings. By learning how Asian organizers, community educators, artists, and healers make sense of their experiences and what values they bring to their respective community learning spaces can support educators in their curriculum development and pedagogical practices in meaningful and sustaining ways for Asian learners.

As I describe later in the Methods chapter, I became more exclusive in inviting specifically Asian non-binary and women movement makers. Considering that they are living at the intersection of racial and gendered systemic oppression, Asian non-binary and women movement makers offer insight in an intersectional liberatory education. Further, it’s important to recognize the ways patriarchal structures and violence against non-binary folks and women exist in society at large, Asian communities, and even racial justice movement spaces (e.g.,

Spencer, 2008; Yoon et al., 2019). Consequently, spaces exclusively for non-binary folks and women may offer a sense of safety that they may not typically find in spaces with men.

### *Positionality*

It's important that I share my sociopolitical standing and experiences that led me to this deeply personal research. I am a Filipina and Chinese cis-hetero second-generation immigrant woman from an upper middle class socio-economic status family. I'm monolingual and was raised in the Bay Area by bilingual parents, aunties, uncles, and grandparents, who migrated from Philippines and Hong Kong to the US after the 1965 Immigration Act. I share these identities to shed light on my positionality of both privileged and oppressed identities within interlocking systems of oppression. These positionings are impacted by historical and current global and local policies, cultures, and structures of white supremacy, imperialism, and colonization. Consequently, my identities inform my experiences, my politics, and how I move in this world. However, this was not something I was made aware of or given guidance around in my K-12 schooling. In many Black, Indigenous, Asian, Latine, and Pacific Islander communities, critical consciousness raising often happens through their lived experiences in a racialized body (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015) and the passing down of knowledges from their families and communities, oftentimes in covert and fugitive ways (Givens, 2021). However, for many People of Color, opportunities to learn towards liberation from these systems of oppression through the centering of our narratives and politics are rarely found in school spaces and with active efforts to ban such curriculums. Rather, I learned about the structures that impact me from my embodied experience and listening to many Asian community members' stories, including my family's, about living with the effects and on-going practices of U.S backed and inflicted wars, oppressive regimes, theft of land, people, labor, life, and resources in many of our home countries. It is also from these communities that I've learned about the legacies of survival,

resistance, solidarities, and joy. These became critical learning spaces for me where I was not only represented racially, but also where my politics and praxis have evolved into committing to transformative and liberatory change.

While Asian students make up the largest Student of Color group at University of Washington (UW), a predominantly white institution, there are minimal opportunities for Asian students to see themselves critically centered in the curriculum. I have much gratitude for the American Ethnic Studies (AES) department, especially the Asian American Studies (AAS) courses at UW who offered the first academic spaces I have had the opportunity to learn about my own racial identity within systems of oppression, and have my lived experience validated as valuable knowledge. Unfortunately, these opportunities at UW are often limited outside of the AES department. Further, these opportunities were non-existent in my K-12.

In response, a group of Asian scholars<sup>1</sup> in the College of Education at UW, including myself, decided to co-create a course centered around Critical Race Theory with an Asian American Studies lens, or AsianCrit for short, based on our lived experiences, abolitionist politics, and our communities' stories that raised our critical consciousness. The AsianCrit Collective was started in the Fall of 2019 before the racialized global pandemic; we recognized the need of learning and teaching these critical knowledges as a form of disrupting violence against our communities, while simultaneously creating a liberatory future. It was important to us that we were "in but not of" the university (Harney & Moten, 2013). While we taught AsianCrit courses at UW, it was not a paid position and instead we volunteered our time. Further, we built community amongst one another and a space of refuge for ourselves. For many of us, this was the first space we were able to see not only our identities reflected back to us, but

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the AsianCrit Collective formation, all co-creators were graduate students. Some members have since graduated with their doctorate.

also our politics that were not always safe to express even in some of our own communities.

While we had created an AsianCrit course, it is important to us that we acknowledge are positionalities as Asian students attached to academia and an institution that has exploited Indigenous lands and Communities of Color. Hence, it was necessary that we critically centered the knowledges of Asian community members who are deeply invested in community liberation and futurity outside of the university.

### *Research Questions*

To inform this study's research questions, I draw from my own lived experiences and other Asian movement spaces that created sustaining learning spaces to address and center the experiences, values, and hopes of our communities. Therefore, in this dissertation, I asked and sought out to answer the following research questions:

1. How do we create chosen, culturally sustaining learning spaces that are grounded in the values and hopes of Asian non-binary and women movement makers (organizers, community educators, artists, and healers)?
2. How might this inform the design of transformational and liberatory learning spaces across settings for Asian youth?

### *Significance*

By learning about the values and hopes of Asian movement makers, we can identify groundings and guidance for creating a liberatory education. As Ladson-Billings (1994) shares, "we teach what we value" (p.46). In opposition to a modernist perspective that truth is objective and therefore educators must be, Ladson-Billings argues that our values come out whether we intend for them to or than not. She considers the fact that we all experience life differently, make various meanings of those experiences, and move in through this world differently.

Consequently, we all have various values and hopes informed by these experiences, meaning makings, and praxis.

Further, organizers, community educators, artists, and healers of community movement spaces are considered educators here in a broad sense. Through modeling and active instruction of organizing, teaching, creating, and care taking, their values and hopes have and continue to shape movements towards liberation for all. It's important that educators across disciplines are learning from movement organizers, community educators, artists, and healers to inform their learning spaces that is support Asian learners' whole selves and further builds on their critical knowledges and bridging from critical theories to liberatory praxis. Therefore, in this dissertation, I seek to add windows into the experiences, values, and hopes of Asian movement makers to offer pedagogical and curricular guides across learning settings, adding to the existing literature of culturally sustaining liberatory education. I guide readers through a qualitative research study that started in the Fall of 2021. This research is informed by guiding theoretical frameworks of Asian Critical Race Theory, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and Universal Design for Learning.

#### *Theoretical Approach*

As mentioned above, I lean on the theoretical frameworks of Asian Critical Race Theory, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and Universal Design for Learning throughout this research. While there are ongoing efforts to examine CSP, AsianCrit, and UDL in school spaces, my work carries these theories outside of school spaces, honoring that many community learning spaces have and continue to put these theories into practice. This research demonstrates the need for utilizing complementary critical theories and pedagogies to cultivate chosen learning spaces for liberation.

### *Methods Approach and Offerings*

For this research, I took on a qualitative narrative-inquiry approach through a survey, interviews, focus group sessions with narrative-based art creations across online and in-person spaces. I was honored to recruit and work alongside 12 Asian non-binary<sup>2</sup> and women organizers, community educators, artists, and healers who are involved in movement spaces in Seattle and/or neighboring cities within King County. AsianCrit, CSP, and UDL frameworks informed how I hosted this research. I ensured the content of discussions and the physical space where we gathered were accessible, culturally representative and relatable, and centered on liberatory relationships and critical reflection.

### *What to expect*

In the next chapter, the Literature Review, I discuss the history of Asian American movement spaces, and K-12 school spaces. I also name the need for liberatory education across learning settings and the strengths of movement spaces' leaders and members' praxis. I end the literature review with the theoretical frameworks of Asian Critical Race Theory, Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and Universal Design for Learning that inform my research questions, methods, and sense making of the findings. Following the literature review, I expand on the qualitative methods of inviting the Collaborators to collaborate in this research, gathering narratives regarding their values and hopes for liberatory futures, cultivating space with them, and finally how I made connections across their narratives. Next, in the Findings chapter, I identified and expand on three major value and hope-based findings. I then discuss possible implications and directions to further this research. I end with a recommendation of actionable steps that brings the implications into action in our daily lives.

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<sup>2</sup> I utilize this term to be encompassing of folks who do not identify within the binary of man and woman.

## Literature Review

To begin to answer the research questions regarding how to cultivate chosen, culturally sustaining learning spaces grounded in the values and hopes of Asian movement makers for liberatory education across learning settings, it is important to situate this research in relationship to on-going conversations in the literature. I begin this chapter by introducing and describing the three theoretical frameworks that I draw from in this study. I then discuss scholarship centered on the historical and existing harm in schools and society at large against Asian folks and especially Asian children and attempts to disrupt such harm. I then review literature focused on Asian American movement spaces and the relational dynamics within them. Within these two sections I discuss theoretical frameworks that I used to guide the literature review, methods, and understandings of the findings.

### *Theoretical Frameworks*

To address the research question regarding the values and hopes of Asian movement makers and to frame my approach to this research, I utilize three lenses: 1) Asian Critical Race Theory, 2) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, and 3) Universal Design for Learning. I used these three lenses to situate this research in conversations in the literature regarding 1) the violence against Asian communities and students in schools and society at large, 2) the efforts to disrupt this violence in school spaces, and 3) the ways Asian movement spaces engage in culturally sustaining practices, while passing down critical knowledges for liberation.

#### 1) Asian Critical Race Theory

Asian Critical Race Theory (AsianCrit) is a lens that disrupts white supremacist attempts of erasure and damage-centered narratives of Asian communities and youth. Its roots exist in Critical Race Theory (CRT) (Bell, 1995) in legal studies to recognize the ways that People of color are racialized under white supremacy. CRT is a lens to analyze how we can understand the

structures of racism and other forms of oppression in the US. Various versions of CRT have been adapted to be more specific to certain identities such as TribalCrit (Indigenous focus), LatCrit (Latinx focus), and AsianCrit (Asian focus). Further, since CRT emphasizes intersectionality, it's important to note that other identities have been centered outside of race, such as DisCrit (disability focus). While CRT and other forms of it originated in legal studies, various scholars have brought it into various fields. For example, Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) and Ladson-Billings (1998) scholarship on CRT is foundational, as they bridge the theory to the field of education. Critical Race Theory is currently under attack, in the latest reiteration of white washing and further erasing the experiences of racism that Communities of Color experience. Out of the 50 states in the US, 49 states have made efforts to ban Critical race theory in school spaces (Alexander, 2022). With the ongoing attacks on Critical Race Theory, there are current bans of books written by many critical Black author/scholars, life threatening policies against trans youth, and the ongoing violence against Asian communities.

To frame this literature review and subsequent chapters, I use Asian Critical Race Theory or AsianCrit for short (Museus & Iftikar, 2013; Curammeng, Buenavista, & Cariaga, 2017). AsianCrit addresses the ways Asian folks are racially positioned in the US, as well as the ways they engage in self-determination in the pursuit of social justice. Museus and Iftikar (2013) offer seven tenets of AsianCrit: 1) Asianization, 2) (Re)constructive history, 3) transnational context, 4) intersectionality, 5) strategic (anti)essentialism, 6) story, theory, and praxis, 7) commitment to social justice. Curammeng, Buenavista, and Cariaga (2017) build onto Museus and Iftikar's (2013) tenets with emphasis on the anti-Blackness and settler colonialism that Asian communities have and continue to engage in. These tenets collectively create a lens in which to better understand Asian American experiences.

The first tenet is Asianization or the ways that Asian folks are racialized in the US context. This includes stereotypes such as the perpetual foreigner, model minority, yellow peril, and monolithic tropes placed onto Asian folks. Next is (re)constructive history, which acknowledges the ways Asian narratives have been invisibilized in US historical and contemporary dominant discourse. This tenet also recognizes the ways Asian folks have intentionally reconstructed such discourse offering up counternarratives that challenge damage-centered narratives (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Tuck, 2009). The tenet of transnational context recognizes the ways that Asian racialized in the US is impacted by transnational context such as orientalism (Said, 1978), imperialism, war, migration, and global economies. Next is the intersectionality tenet, which honors the ways Asian folks exist in tandem with other oppressed identities (e.g., disability, queer, women and non-binary, low socioeconomic status) which create an entirely different experience than if one was an Asian cis-hetero man.

Another tenet is strategic (anti)essentialism--the intentionality of creating a collective identity to promote solidarity (e.g., Asian), as well as the intentionality of disaggregating the complex identities within the Asian diaspora (e.g., South Asian, Hmong, Asian refugee, etc.), which pushes back against the trope of Asians being seen as a monolith. Story, theory, and praxis is the next tenet of AsianCrit. This tenet explains that the lived experiences (story) of Asian folks, the meaning making and way they perceive the world (theory), and the ways they move in the world (praxis) inform one another. Therefore, each aspect of this tenet is important to consider, as it can provide an in-depth understanding of Asian narratives. Lastly, the commitment to social justice is the final tenet, which honors the ways Asian folks in the US have always resisted and refused the oppression placed on them. This tenet also recognizes the ways

Asian folks are inextricably linked to other oppressed groups and therefore honors the solidarity as a move towards collective liberation.

## 2) Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy

The second theoretical framework I utilize throughout this research is Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2017). CSP “calls for sustaining and revitalizing that which has over the centuries sustained us as communities of color struggling to ‘make it’- to resist, revitalize, and reimagine- under enduring colonial conditions that constantly work to diminish our intellectual capacities, cultures, languages, and, yes, our very lives” (Alim & Paris, 2017, pp.12-13). In other words, the goal of CSP is to sustain the strengths that Communities of Color used to exist in a place not built for us. Further, Paris and Alim (2017) ask educators in all contexts, *what must be sustained within the youth we serve?* CSP seeks to sustain physical lives, cultural knowledges and skills, languages, identities, strength-based histories, critical reflexivity, critical consciousness, and hopes and dreams of those with targeted identities. Further, Paris and Alim mention that CSP occurs wherever lifeways are sustained.

Paris (2021) offers educators four key aspects of CSP. First, he names that learning spaces that utilizing CSP critically center the identities, cultural knowledges, languages, and ways of being of those oppressed by white supremacy. Second, he names that learning spaces must practice community accountability by ensuring the collaboration and engagement of community members. Third, there needs to be a consistent effort to pursue being in good relationships with yourself, one another, and Indigenous lands and communities. Lastly, he emphasizes the importance of having facilitated and scaffolded opportunities to practice self-reflexivity to disrupt our own internalized oppressions.

### 3) Universal Design for Learning

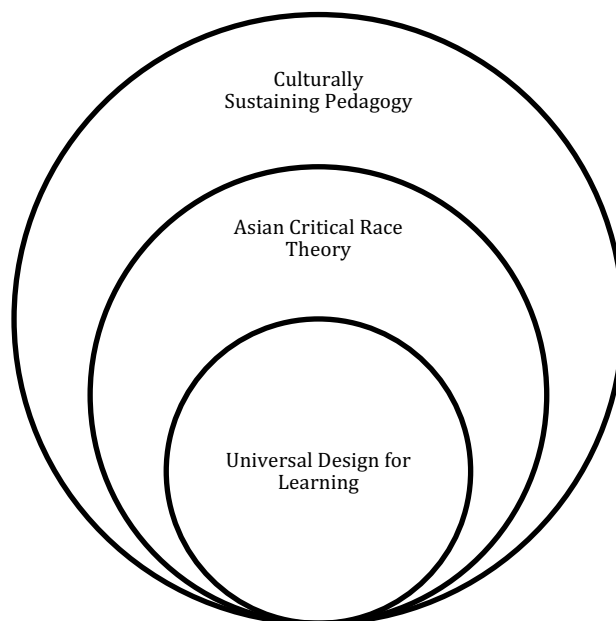
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is rooted universal design that was co-created in the Center for Universal Design (1997) at North Carolina State University to “improve the quality and availability of housing for people with disabilities”. They offer 7 principles that describe an accessible space: 1) Equitable Use, 2) Flexibility in Use, 3) Simple and Intuitive Use, 4) Perceptible Information, 5) Tolerance for Error, 6) Low Physical Effort, and 7) Size and Space for Approach and Use. Building off of this work, Rose and Meyer (2002) created the Universal Design for Learning framework which offers guiding principles that allows for flexibility for students across learning settings and across various access needs(Rose & Meyer, 2002). Further, CAST (2018) offers three guiding aspects of UDL, which are to provide multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression.

Waitoller and King Thorius (2016) advocate for the cross pollination between CSP and UDL. They name that “UDL would benefit from cross-pollination with CSP because it would take on a more critical and reflective stance in its notion of expert learners” (p.375). They explain that UDL must go beyond an assimilationist approach to inclusion, and instead be sustaining “ability pluralism” and interrogating what about the culture of disability should be sustained and what shouldn’t, such as deficit-based labels used to further oppress. Finally, in a dialogue response (Alim et al., 2017) to Waitoller and King (2016), Valente names that,

“the potential for [the crosspollination between CSP and UDL] has to do with the idea of it being transformative, if it can reach its potential, the idea that we are not just including someone but that they are meaningful members of the community. I think that’s really the sustaining piece.”

Here Valente echoes Waitoller and King Thorius (2016) and explains that for UDL to be a part of CSP, it needs to have goals of transforming oppressive societies and center and sustain the agencies of community members.

This study is guided by CSP, AsianCrit, and UDL. CSP, is a pedagogical practice informed by liberatory politics. AsianCrit is liberatory worldview, as is LatCrit, TribalCrit, DisCrit, etc. All these worldviews coexist, offering windows into the lived realities of communities who have been targeted by white supremacy. CSP tells us to center the ways of knowing and being of people and communities who these worldviews are centered on. UDL is one necessary aspect to inform how to turn these worldviews into tangible teaching practices. UDL is informed by intersectional accessibility, and CSP and AsianCrit honor intersectionality, which includes accessibility. Below is an image of how I am conceptualizing the three theoretical frameworks coexisting to inform this study.



*Figure 2 Conceptualization of CSP, AsianCrit, and UDL theories and principles*

Below, I provide examples of literature that discusses the societal and school perpetuated harm through Asianization and transnational context, as well as the efforts to disrupt such harm

through (re)constructive history, intersectionality, strategic (anti)essentialism, story, theory, and praxis, and commitment to social justice. Further, I look at examples of CSP in K-12 classroom space centering Asian youth.

### *Violence against Asian communities across time and setting*

Violence against Asian communities have existed across time and setting. In the following subsections, I provide examples of normalized violence in society and towards Asian youth in K-12 schools.

#### Anti-Asian violence in society

There is a plethora of examples of the various ways violence exists against Asian communities and youth. I organize the following examples through the different ways Asian folks are racialized through stereotypes of yellow peril and model minority, and the compounded stereotypes and oppression that exists for Asian folks at the intersection of interlocking systems of oppression.

#### Yellow Peril

In the mid 1800s Chinese men were brought over as “miners, railroad builders, farmers, factory workers, and fishermen” ([Asia Society, n.d.](#)). Quickly following were other Asian laborer including Filipino and Japanese settlers working sugar plantations in Hawaii (Takaki, 2012). It’s important to note that legalized enslavement “ended”<sup>3</sup> in the US in 1865. The recruitment of cheap labor was pertinent to the capitalistic US empire, to replace enslaved labor on stolen land. During this time, tensions grew with economically poor white folks with sentiments that Asian folks were stealing jobs and white women<sup>4</sup>(Takaki, 2012). Takaki explains that “Employers developed a dual-wage system to pay Asian laborers less than white workers and bitted the

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<sup>3</sup> enslavement is still legal in the US under the 13th amendment naming that incarcerated folks are legally subjected to enslavement (DuVernay, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Note the way women are seen as property to be stolen.

groups against each other to depress wages for both.” (p.13) While “yellow peril” narratives began when Chinese laborer came to the US, it is recycled throughout Asian American history in the US. For example, as Yoo (2022) recounts, the murder of Chinese engineer, Vincent Chin in 1982, who was beaten to death by two white autoworkers, saying “It’s because of you little motherfuckers that we’re out of work”<sup>5</sup> (Man, 2020). This is an example of the ways anti-Asian rhetoric is normalized and allows for the escalation of violence from a stereotype to murder.

### Model Minority

In addition to being seen as yellow peril, Asian communities have also faced the harms of the model minority stereotype. Asian Americans have been positioned by white supremacy as being the model minority, in that we are viewed as having succeeded in upward mobility, specifically referring to education and socioeconomic status, without “allowing” racism against us prohibit such mobility. However, this trope was intentionally created to invalidate the Civil Rights and Black Power movement (Chow, 2017). Tragically, part of the violence against Asian communities with this stereotype is the dangers of internalizing this racism and further perpetuating it against other Communities of Color. For example, this violence has spanned from the opposition of affirmative action by Asian folks exploiting the model minority myth (Chen, 2018) to the support and defense of Peter Liu in 2014 and Tou Thao in 2020, both Asian police officers who murdered Black men (Wong, 2021). As Wu and Nguyen (2022) explain, “‘yellow peril’ and ‘model minority’ are two sides of the same racist coin, and Whites possess the institutional power to flip it as needed” (p.1).

### Compounded Oppression

Further, anti-Asian violence is not separate from the interlocking systems of power.

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<sup>5</sup> It’s important to note “Vincent Chin's killing happened at the height of anti-Asian racism, as competition from Japan's import cars was unfairly blamed for the mass layoffs throughout the American auto industry.” (Yoo, 2022, p.33).

Brown Asians, Muslim Asians, Asian women, and other Asian folks who live at the intersections of multiple systems of oppression experience multiple forms of violence. For examples, there have been multiple mass shootings that targeted Asian elders, Sikh Asians, Asian women (Nadal, 2019). Further, after 9/11, many Brown Asians experienced a rise in hate crimes and subjected to racial profiling and subjected to intrusive searches at airports (Chandrasekhar, 2003; Finn, 2011; Iyer, 2017). Violence against Asian Americans have existed since our existence in the US. From policies, social rhetoric, and internalized racism, this consistent violence has been normalized.

Across time, anti-Asian policies, rhetoric, and state-sanctioned violence have existed in the US. This violence is normalized and exists from stereotypes to mass murder. There is a critical and urgent need to disrupt this violence and move towards liberatory futures.

#### Harm in schools

The normalization of anti-Asian violence is not only seen in society at large, but also exist in school settings as well. It's important to examine school settings as a site of violence because schooling in the US is rooted in spirit murdering<sup>6</sup> and assimilation into whiteness (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Williams, 1987). To date, 49 states in the US have made efforts to ban Critical Race Theory primarily in K-12 schools (Alexander, 2023; UCLA School of Law, 2023). These efforts continue to result in unsustaining and harmful classroom spaces for Asian youth. Further, schools are mandated for youth and where they spend majority of their time. Below I provide examples of literature that discusses anti-Asian violence in schools organized by themes of 1) erasure and essentialism, 2) internalized white supremacy, and 3) intersectionality.

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<sup>6</sup> Williams (1987) coins and defines spirit murder as a product of racism, the “disregard for others whose lives qualitatively depend on our regard” (p.151), “cultural cancer”, and “spiritual genocide” (p.155).

### Erasure and essentialism

Erasure and essentialism in school spaces are harmful strategies aligned with an assimilationist education. We see this exist from the erasure of Asian youths' cultures, languages, and complex identities. For example, Kohli and Solórzano (2012) explain the harms of constant mispronunciations and ridicule of Asian names, resulting in dehumanization of students, internalized racism pushing many students to choose more "American" names, and erasure and invisibilization of a students' culture. Names are significant to students' identities yet continues to be a butchered and ridiculed in classroom spaces. In addition to the erasure of Asian students' names, An's (2016) analysis of 10 states' K-12 social studies standards, reveals that Asian American histories and experiences are reduced to Japanese American incarceration and the first wave of Chinese immigration in the mid to late 1800s. This limited history is another form of erasure and essentializing of the experiences of folks across the Asian Diaspora. Additionally, An found that from the limited histories shared of Asian Americans contributions in the US, they were often further perpetuating stereotypes of being apolitical model minorities and perpetual foreigners. Similarly, in a study with two Southeast Asian (Cambodian and Burmese) fourth graders and the students' Vietnamese teacher, Wu and Nguyen (2022) learned that the students did not see their ethnic identities represented in the school's library. Rather, the minimal Asian representation available was relegated to East Asian communities, an issue in essentializing. Relatedly, Rice (2020) conducted a study with 10 South Asian American young adults to discuss retrospective reflections from their K-12 experiences. Rice discusses the racial trauma of being positioned as a spokesperson for their communities and the essentializing and perpetual foreigner stereotype that it perpetuates.

### Internalized white supremacy

More literature unveils the continued perpetuation of racial stereotypes that contribute to the Asianization of Asian students as well as the harm of internalized racism that contributes to the violence against other oppressed communities. Ngo and Lee (2007) explain how the model minority myth “is used to silence and contain Asian Americans even as it silences other racial groups” (p.416). The authors refer to the way Asian Americans are placed in a box of how to exist, silencing their experiences of systemic racism and their generational impacts.

Concurrently, the model minority myth is used to suggest that there is a “problem minority” (Abad, 2021). It’s important to note that this stereotype was strategically popularized in the 1960s, during the Black Power movement---a movement recognized as a threat to upholding white supremacy. Consequently, this stereotype weaponized Asian communities to further perpetuate anti-Blackness (Chow, 2017). Buenavista (2018) also discuss how this stereotype can be internalized by undocumented Asian American students who have overstayed their visas and how “the differentiation between their entry from that of Latino immigrants was meant to deter the negative characterizations generally associated with undocumented status, as well as to validate their potential legality and social acceptance.” (p. 87-88). In this literature, Buenavista describes the harmful anti-Latine narratives Asian students have perpetuated to position themselves as model minority under standards set by white supremacy.

### Intersectionality

Additionally, in a conceptual piece, Chhuon and Sullivan (2013) consider the intersections of being Asian and neurodivergent when they stated “...Asian American students’ invisibility in special education and hypervisibility in gifted education represent racial projects that reinforce the model minority stereotype” (p.55). The model minority stereotype has also limited Asian American students’ access to neuro-diverse education and academic support. Park

(2019) offers further nuance in a study with two Asian kindergarteners' special education determination process. Park argues that "educators' internalization of the model minority stereotype led them to jump to the conclusion that Asian Americans who deviated from this image had disabilities" (p.73). The author concludes with suggestions to utilize CSP and UDL for teacher education and schools to "engage in critically analyzing their special education identification processes with Asian American youth" (p.89).

Across these examples, it cannot be ignored that violence against Asian communities have existed across time and settings in the US. Further, as some examples show, Asian folks and students can become inflictors of harm. Therefore, utilizing an AsianCrit, CSP, and UDL framework to ground pedagogy and curriculum across learning settings is critical to engage Asian students in their own histories, current contexts, and self-reflexivity to be foster growth towards solidarity, dismantling of oppressive structures, and a creation of a liberatory world.

#### *Sustaining Asian Youth in School Spaces*

While anti-Asian violence historically and currently exist in school spaces, efforts are being made to move towards more sustaining classrooms that seek to disrupt anti-Asian oppression and center strength-based narratives of Asian students and communities. Although the literature of documented implementation of CSP and AsianCrit centered pedagogy and curriculum is limited, below are a few examples if K-12 teachers committed to move towards more a culturally sustaining classroom.

Rodríguez (2019) conducted a case study that evaluated three Asian American elementary educators in Texas that carried out Asian American history lessons. Amongst the findings, the author describes the teachers confronting oppressive narratives of the incarceration of Japanese Americans and related such historical events to current contexts. The author concludes the study naming that "AsianCrit perspectives can provide a useful curricular

framework through with educators can disrupt the problematic dominant narrative by centering Asian American voices, experiences, and historical narratives” (p.231). While Rodríguez alludes to reconstructive history and story, theory, praxis tenets of AsianCrit being necessary for disrupting oppressive narratives, this suggestion also sheds light on the importance of CSP’s first key aspect of centering the ways of knowing and being of Communities of Color. Further, Rodríguez (2021) offers that educators in the same case study prompted students to engage in cultural citizenship, that views their “differences as a resource” and that promoted students’ agency to create change, as evidenced in students’ podcast “to share their knowledge about injustice with others” (pp. 37-38). This is also evidence of CSP’s second key aspect of engaging in community accountability, recognizing that students can and should have agency in learning towards liberation.

Similarly, Hsieh (2021), also engaged in a case study with 3 Asian American K-12 educators. Through interviews, educators “described how they built relationships with students that helped foster cross-racial solidarity and understanding.” This aligns with AsianCrit’s commitment to social justice tenet and CSP’s call for engaging in scaffolded opportunities for critical self-reflexivity. However, they named not having access to models of how to implement Asian American stories throughout their curricula. Further, Hsieh mentions that one of the three teachers who was regularly able to center Asian American stories had “critical, race and justice-centered” teacher preparation and continuous professional development resources.

Unfortunately, there is limited literature documenting the strategic pedagogical and curricular implementations by K-12 teachers specifically centering liberation and Asian American students in accessible and culturally sustaining ways. However, much conceptual scholarship advocate for liberatory framed curriculum, including but not limited to AsianCrit

(e.g., An, 2020). Due to the lack of literature identifying CSP and AsianCrit informed pedagogies and curricula, educators and scholars can turn to learning that happens outside school walls and in Asian movement spaces.

### *Asian Movement Spaces*

Considering that learning happens everywhere and anywhere, it's important for educators and scholars to learn from Asian movement spaces who are committed to liberatory futures.

Below are examples of Asian led movement spaces that have continued a legacy of disrupting systems of oppression and centering community, culture, and joy.

Between 1968 and 1977, San Francisco based group of intersectional Asian American activists organized to protect elder Asian tenets of the International Hotel from eviction and displacement by corporate efforts to gentrify. This hotel served as a hub for youth activism and art before it was eventually bulldozed in 1977 (Aguirre & Lio, 2008). After pressure from community activists over the course of several years, it was rebuilt and later opened in 2005 (The I-Hotel, 2023).

Over on the East Coast, similar efforts were being made to stop the displacement of Chinatown residents. Man (2020) discusses the Coalition Against Anti-Asian Violence that was started in 1986 in New York. This organization named their lived experience acknowledging that anti-Asian violence was not new nor was it uncommon and that it was connected to the oppressive structures of stolen land and enslavement. In 1987, CAAAV organized movements with Chinatown residents against police brutality, following the unlawful breaking and entering, beating, and arrest of Chinese immigrants. Man also explains that the CAAAV carried on the legacies of former community organizations that fought against displacement of Chinatown residents. He states,

*“This Third World consciousness, a legacy of the global anti-colonial revolts of the late 1960s, allowed activists to extend their analysis beyond the boundaries of their own communities and to draw connections to anti-racist and anti-capitalist struggles around the world.” (pp. 30-31).*

Their actions towards cross racial, transnational, and intersectional solidarity alongside their “Third World consciousness” and politics are the critical knowledges that are being pass down across time and movements.

Further, Nguyen (2020) recognized the importance of culturally sustaining pedagogy and surveyed Vietnamese high school students attending a youth summit hosted by Vietnamese American Youth Association (VietAYA), a community organization that started in 1992, working with Vietnamese students involved in a Vietnamese culture club at their respective schools. Nguyen learned that students saw their clubs and VietAYA as places of belonging where they were able to learn more about their Vietnamese culture and centered their languages and ways of expression from strength-based perspectives. Nguyen describes how this consequently prompted one student to critically reflect on the ways they engaged in cultural appropriation of Chicana culture because they wanted to distance themselves from racial stereotypes projected onto Asian students. Finally, Nguyen shared that some Vietnamese students organized and advocated for the revival of a previously shut down Vietnamese culture club at their school. Nguyen’s study emphasis that students contribute to making their clubs culturally sustaining and is essential for their well-being and for bridging their stories, theories, and praxis for culturally sustaining spaces.

Further, Wong et al. (2022) argues that community-based organizations are useful in support public health particularly in bridging Asian communities, who face particular disparities in accessing health care during a highly racialized pandemic, and health care services. Their research is informed by their National Advisor Community (NAC), make up of representatives

from community organization that serve Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. They explain that these community organizations hold certain strengths, including linguistic and cultural familiarity, that allow them to support Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities in accessing health care during the pandemic.

Between CAAV, VietAYA and Vietnamese culture clubs, and NAC, one can recognize the power that community movement spaces hold in disrupting systemic violence against Asian communities and youth, as well as the ways communities have cared for one another through accessibility, seeing and affirming cultural strengths and personal identities, and being a space to take action towards more liberatory worlds. Many Asian community organizations continue to guide community members in learning, safety, and identity sustenance.

To locate myself within this research and literature review, I share below a few examples of Asian movement spaces that I've learned from. They are based in New York, Minnesota, and Washington, yet maintain a social media presence for folks to engage virtually. While colonial schools are rarely spaces that sustain the identities of Asian students, there are plenty of examples of Asian community spaces that engage in CSP, AsianCrit, and UDL practices (in and outside of Seattle).

#### Asian American Feminist Collective

The Asian American Feminist Collective consist of Asian women from across the Asian diaspora focused on education regarding identity politics, community collaboration and social justice action. They started in a response to the exclusion and tokenization of Women of Color in the Women's March of 2017<sup>7</sup>. They state, "We work to interrogate and dismantle systems of

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<sup>7</sup> This march was in response to the inauguration of the 45<sup>th</sup> president. However, it was critique by many Women of Color for its display of white feminism, or the performative, white-cis-hetero- centered demonstration masked as feminism and have pointed out the fact that 53% of white women voted for the 45<sup>th</sup> president.

racism, imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism and are deeply invested in abolition, queer liberation, cross-racial solidarity, and collective joy” (Asian American Feminism, 2021). While they are based in New York, they continue to make their resources available online. They also host educational workshops online that I’ve attended. Further, they’ve created a community zine that features discussions, artwork, and resources regarding survival and resistance in the time of a racialized pandemic, while Asian. Their work continues to be a model of an ever-evolving community learning space that features the narratives of Asian folks while aligning their justices with intersecting identities (e.g., folks with disabilities, non-binary folks, low-income families), as well as other Communities of Color.

#### Southeast Asian Diaspora (SEAD) Project

The Southeast Asian Diaspora Project centers Southeast Asian community members’ stories from Minneapolis. They start the project in 2011 to connect and reimagine sustainable Southeast Asian communities. They utilize storytelling as a method of humanizing Southeast Asian folks, in a country that continues to render them invisible, and building relationships within and beyond Asian diasporic communities. They also offer language revitalization, self-defense, and community healing workshops, centering Southeast Asian linguistic cultures and practices of community care. SEAD continues to advocate for abolition of I.C.E., the institution of policing and prisons, aligning with their pursuit for collective liberation. I’ve purchased their book that included artwork and stories from their communities written in various languages.

#### API Chaya

Locally to Seattle, API Chaya was founded in the 1990s and is a survivor-led organization seeking to support Asian, South Asian, and Pacific Islander survivors of gender-based violence. Even within an already marginalized group, they continue to center the

knowledge and voices of API folks with intersecting identities including, trans, Black and Indigenous, immigrant, young, and queer folks. They explicitly name their commitments to “providing culturally-relevant, linguistically-appropriate direct services to survivors” as well as organizing to end violence. (API Chaya History, n.d).

While these examples are only a small fraction of the many Asian community learning spaces in the US, it’s important to recognize the qualities they have in common. These spaces offer its Asian community members and youth a chosen learning environment that centers their languages, cultures, and agency, and provides opportunities for communal conversations addressing internalized oppression and the importance of intersectional solidarity. They also are informed by past movement spaces and address a need in their communities inherently disrupting systemic violence against their communities and others.

These Asian-led movement spaces are critical to the survival and liberatory of Asian communities and youth. While the studies of movement spaces and my experience of learning from Asian led movement spaces shed light on the criticality and potential of liberatory education, no studies have explicitly examined the experiences, values, and hopes of a group of Asian movement makers who are creating culturally sustaining learning environments and their potential pedagogical and curricular implications.

In this literature review, I discussed three theoretical frameworks that guides the direction of this research in attempts to answer the research questions regarding moving towards a liberatory education rooted in the values and hopes of Asian movement makers. I offer background of the perpetual and insidious violence against Asian communities and students in society at large and the ways schools carry out that harm in classrooms. I review the few examples of empirical studies that directly address attempts to disrupt harm in school spaces

against Asian students through pedagogical and curricular interventions. However, the literature is sparse. I then offered examples of the ways Asian American movement spaces have cultivated care and passed down critical knowledges. I end with a few examples of Asian American online movement spaces that I've learned from as an Asian community member. My study aims to address the gap in literature that centers Asian movement makers who are passing down critical liberatory knowledges in culturally sustaining ways with Asian youth who experience unsustaining spaces in schools and society at large.

## **Methods**

To address these research questions, I connected with and recruited a highly curated group of Asian organizers, community educators, artists, and healers. In this chapter, I discuss what approach was used to answer the research questions, the criteria for joining the study, and various forms of gathering narratives from the Collaborators, the way we collectively cultivated space for one another, and finally how I approached distilling themes from the narratives shared.

### *Approach*

Utilizing the qualitative narrative analysis approach, I learned from the first-person stories of Asian community educators, artists, healers, and organizers. Additionally, I came to this research from an interpretive/constructivist epistemological perspective (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.12). Therefore, this research recognizes that “there are multiple realities, of interpretations, of a single event” (p.11). This is reflected, for example, in the multiple member reflection (Tracy, 2010) opportunities community collaborators had to confirm or change in the analysis portion of the study. Additionally, from this perspective, it is understood that collaborator’s sociopolitical wisdom (Sánchez Carmen et al., 2015) is created by their experiences in a racialized body and their meaning making from their experiences, therefore disrupting the trope of monolithic perspectives and aspirations of Asian folks.

Lastly, I utilized an arts-based research approach as well through creative modalities including love letter writing, memory lane (geographical mapping), food, and altars. Bailey and Van Harken (2014) emphasize the ways multi-modal forms of expression facilitate learning and deep reflection that words alone may not be able to fully express. I used this method particularly to achieve data for document analysis.

### *Procedures*

To carry out a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, I made intentional choices to recruit potential research collaborators, build and maintain relationship, host focus group sessions, create reflective and art-based curriculum, and make meaning from the collaborators' narratives and art.

### Recruitment

For this research, I connected with 12 Asian identified educators, artists, and organizers who are invested in Asian communities in Seattle. Throughout this section I refer to them as “the Collaborators”. Because I am engaged in a few Communities of Color spaces, I have built relationships with a few folks who would fit the description of Asian community educator, artists, and/or organizer. Therefore, I used purposeful sampling. Honigmann (1982) explains that this type of sampling is most appropriate for qualitative research, as the researcher is seeking to learn the “implications of what occurs” rather than measuring quantity or frequency (p. 84). In this research, I specifically reached out to folks who have specific identities (Asian non-binary and women community educators, artists, and organizers), experiences (living in Seattle), and commitments (in Asian communities' well-being, safety, and liberation) in regard to addressing how educators can cultivate culturally sustaining learning spaces for Asian learners. Further, I've utilized convenience sampling to create a recruitment list. This is a particularly useful sampling method that honors community-based and humanizing research, as it allows for researchers to do research with folks whom we have built relationships with by being in community with them. Therefore, I have created a participant recruitment list pulling from multiple resources. For example, My Peoples Studio, an Asian-led organization in Seattle, created a community zine featuring Asian women creatives. Additionally, Nourish, a collective of community organizers in Seattle, created a community zine as well, showcasing autobiographically storytelling through

recipes, in which multiple Asian organizers were featured. Both zines were primarily advertised and distributed in community spaces that I frequent. I came across the Nourish zine at The Station, a Black and Brown owned coffee shop and community organizing space in Seattle. Additionally, I was introduced to My Peoples Studio and their zine by an Asian interior designer featured in the zine, whom I've worked with before on a community-based study regarding how they bring Asian cultures into their design style. Lastly, I've included multiple Asian educators, artists, and organizers in Seattle whose work I follow on social media, at community events, and in previous research with Asian community members (Washington, Germinaro, Mendoza Chui, & Ramirez, 2020). In total I invited 24 potential community collaborators to join the study through e-mail and Instagram direct messaging. 10 folks had scheduling conflicts. 2 in total did not respond. In the end, there were a total of 12 collaborators that committed and followed through with the study.

#### Asian

While the definition of Asian is ever changing with sociopolitical dynamics and geographic borders, I use the term Asian to refer to people who have ancestry and/or heritage in Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese, Pakistani, Cambodian, Hmong, Bangladeshi, Laotian, Thai, Burmese, Nepalese, Taiwanese, Indonesian, Sri Lankan, Malaysian, Bhutanese, Mongolian, and/or Okinawan. Recognizing that the identities, and Asian is vast, I was intentional in trying to invite collaborators across the Diaspora. In the end, the 12 collaborators ethnic backgrounds represented 9 of the 21 geographical countries, as followed: India, China, Philippines, Vietnam, South Korea, Okinawa, Malaysia, and Cambodia. It is important to note the ethnic identities that exist beyond political geographical borders. For example, one of the collaborators is Cham which is an Indigenous ethnic group that exists primarily in Vietnam and Cambodia. Another collaborator is Khmer, which geographically can

be linked to Cambodia, but many Khmer communities are refugees in Thailand, Vietnam, and the US.

#### Non-binary folks and women

At the start of planning for this research, I intended to open the invitation to all Asian folks across gender identity. However, as I finalized the call for the study, I intentionally excluded all men<sup>8</sup>, on the basis that the presence of men in the space may change the dynamics of a collective space and feelings of safety, considering patriarchal structures. In my attempt to cultivate a chosen space with and for the movement makers, I wanted to create a space where they felt they could take up space and be centered in regard to race and gender, which is a rare space to be a part of. Further, as folks who experience multiple intersections of systemic oppression, they offer a unique perspective into teaching liberatory education. I want to highlight that trans and gender non-conforming men experience oppression under cis-heteronormativity, white supremacy, and colonization, within and beyond Asian communities. Their experiences are as crucial as well, however, outside the scope of this research. The folks in collaboration with me for this research study include, but are not limited, to trans and cis women, genderqueer, transmasculine, genderfluid, non-binary, and femme folks. Throughout this study, I refer to these gender identities under the umbrella of non-binary folks and women (PFLAG, 2021).

#### Live in Seattle or surrounding cities

Additionally, the call for the study also included the requirement to identify as living in King County. Originally this was Seattle specifically, but with its history of redlining and ongoing gentrification, many Communities of Color have been pushed out to South Seattle, and cities south of Seattle including Renton, Tukwila, and Kent. This research is location specific

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<sup>8</sup> It's important to note that language used to describe gender identity and expression are ever-changing. Further, multiple gender identities and expressions can coexist and are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, I did not define "all men" and left it up to the Collaborators' own interpretation.

considering that Asian communities across the country are heterogeneous and vary in culture. At the start of the study, collaborators' time residing in Puget Sound ranged from 11 months to 24 years. Most live in Central or South Seattle.

While Seattle is a predominantly white city, Asian folks make up the largest racial group of Color. Further, Asian folks have existed in Seattle since the late 1800s, as white settler colonial enslavers sought to replace enslaved labor with cheap/exploitative labor. Further, Asian communities in Seattle have experienced red lining during de facto Jim Crow, which continues to influence racialized neighborhoods today (The Seattle Civil Rights & Labor History Consortium, n.d.). More recently, there has been a rise in cases of anti-Asian hate in Seattle during the racialized pandemic (Pasia, 2021). Therefore, it's likely that Asian community educators, artists, and organizers and their families have and are experiencing systemic anti-Asian violence, which may be a motivating factor for their pursuit in racial justice.

Organizer, community educator, artist, and/or healer

I sought out folks who work primarily outside of school spaces to home in on the expertise and experiences of those in community learning spaces. By organizers, I am referring to folks who mobilize, guide, and support their communities. Community educators refer to folks who teach outside of school contexts. This might look like hosting workshops at a museum, for example. Artists are also critical to learning in community spaces. As James Baldwin said, "Artists are here to disrupt the peace." In this statement, Baldwin refers to the status quo, the normalized systems of oppression. Lastly, I hoped to learn from healers who keep folks alive and well, a practice that inherently works against systems of oppression that seek to spirit murder and quite literally murder the oppressed. Healers could include herbalists, acupuncturists, nutritionists, therapists, etc. I excluded folks who were exclusively school teachers. While this is an important group to learn from, it was outside the scope of this research. While folks who were

simultaneously school teachers and an organizer, community educator, artists, and/or healer were welcome, none of the Collaborators were K-12 teachers.

Works with Asian youth (although not exclusively)

The requirement to work with Asian youth (although not exclusively) was important considering that the Collaborators are teaching them outside of school spaces. The purpose of this study focuses on learning about the experiences, values, and hopes of Asian movement makers that are cultivating learning spaces with and for youth. While learning about their pedagogy and direct interactions with youth was not centered in this study, their experiences, values, and hopes will offer implications of liberatory pedagogical practices when working with Asian youth that is discussed in the final chapter.

Have commitments to social justice

This recruitment requirement allowed me to get in touch with folks who were aware of social injustices and had motivations to be active in movement spaces. I kept this requirement up to interpretation to acknowledge that terms like “abolition”, “anti-imperialism”, and “liberation” can be considered jargony and the Collaborators may not use this language. However, with this language change, I anticipated a range of definitions of social justice, some of which may be conflicting. For example, abolitionists are distinctly different from reformists in that they believe in the collapse of oppressive structures for social justice, while reformists believe in a more conservative approach of changing the structures. This difference can be seen with the example of policing. Abolitionists believe in the dismantling of the institution of policing, while reformists have called for body cameras and diversity trainings, while maintaining the institution of policing.

Legal adult (18+)

The only age requirement for this study was that folks needed to be legal adults (18+).

While there is a critical need to learn about youth activism, I sought out adults for this study to

consider folks who teach/led youth and who have finished compulsory schooling (to reflect on their full schooling experiences). Collaborators' ages ranged from 20s to 40s, placing most folks as millennials. Most collaborators are 1st or 2nd generation immigrants and/or refugees. A couple of the collaborators are 3rd generation. This aligns with major migration waves to Seattle.

#### *Additional Identities*

While I did not specifically ask for the following identities, collaborators brought them up in conversation, during interviews, and/or during group sessions.

#### *Higher Education*

While there was no requirement for level of educational attainment, all collaborators have bachelor's degrees, and many have master's degrees or are currently in master's or doctoral degree programs; one has a PharmD. Majority of collaborators have or had affiliation (student/employee) with University of Washington; this makes sense considering that 58% of UW alumni are Puget Sound residents.

#### *Other intersectional identities*

As Crenshaw (1989) explains, intersectionality takes into consideration two or more oppressed identities that one may experience that create a compounded experience in addition to the individualized experiences of systems of oppression. Therefore, it's important to note that most collaborators are queer, some have disabilities, are neurodivergent, and some have experienced sexual and/or domestic violence. A few collaborators identify as Muslim. This is critical in understanding that movement leaders are often those who are targets of multiple systems of oppression.

#### *Meet the Collective + Collaborators*

As I explain more in depth further in this chapter, I collaborated with 12 Asian non-binary and women organizers, community educators, artists, and healers (whom I refer to as the Collaborators throughout my writing) for over a year through surveys, interviews, focus group

sessions, creating reflective art, and beyond. Further, I want to acknowledge and express gratitude here for members of the AsianCrit Collective, all of whom supported me throughout this study, from the brainstorming this study's proposal to hosting focus group sessions. Together, we discussed the 12 collaborators' experiences in K-12 schools, community spaces, their relationships with themselves, the land, their ancestors, each other, and the future generation, their politics, and their hopes for the future. As organizers, educators, artists, and healers of various communities, the Collaborators are well known in social justice spheres in King County. Naming them here is intentional---a way to honor them and their continuing impacts as movement makers educating the next generation for liberation. Beyond this dissertation, we are currently creating a zine summarizing our experiences, learnings, and care for one another that we'll be making publicly accessible to our respective communities. Below are zine pages they created to introduce themselves. Like all the activities and discussions throughout this research, the movement makers always had access to pass or opt out. Due to capacity restraints, three movement makers and four AsianCrit Collective members did not create a bio page at the time of submitting this dissertation.

The Collaborators/ Movement Makers

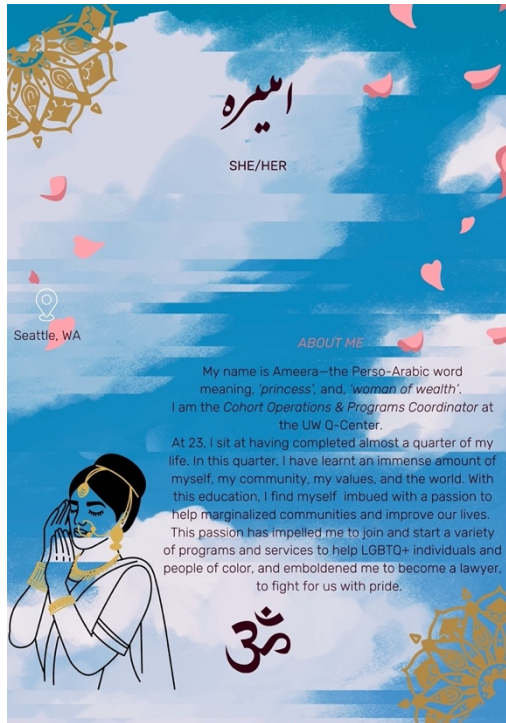


Figure 4 Ameera (she/her)



Figure 3 Alexis (she/they/siya)



Figure 5 Angelii (they/she)



Figure 6 Ammara (she/they)



Figure 7 Meryl Haque (they/them)



Figure 8 Julie Feng (she/her)



Figure 10 Meilani Mandery (she/her)



Figure 9 Diana (she/her)

*Peace be upon you*

I'm a community member, storyteller, eldest daughter of Cham refugees who believes in collective liberation and reclamation by ways of food, community, and economy. After receiving my Bachelor's in Sociology and Master's in Business Administration at Mills College, I began work as the Food Justice Coordinator at the Rainier Beach Action Coalition. You may also find me at my mom's restaurant called Salima Specialties in Skyway!

**NURHALIZA MOHAMATH**

*she/her/they's*  
*Cham Diaspora*  
*South Seattle, WA*

Figure 11 Nurhaliza Mohamath (she/her)

The Collective

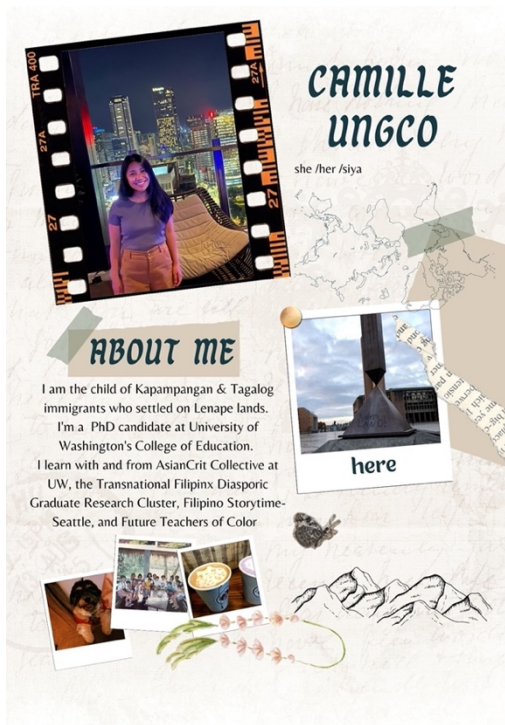


Figure 13 Camille Ungco (she/her/siya)



Figure 12 Rae Jing Han (they/them/tā)



Figure 14 Theresa Lee (she/her)

### *Procedures: Hosting Research & Gathering Narratives*

To learn more about the values and hopes of the Collaborators, I created multiple avenues to learn about their narratives. In this section, I discuss steps I took to better get to know the Collaborators with an Introductory Survey, Accessibility Survey, and Introductory Interview. Then, I explain the breakdown of the five focus group sessions, in which we, collectively, were in conversation and created critical self-reflective art. Finally, I conclude with a summary of a reflective Outro Interview I have with each Collaborator.

#### Introductory Screening Survey

After recruiting 12 community collaborators, I asked that they complete an Introductory survey virtually on Google Forms. My intention was to use this survey to confirm that they met the criteria for the study and to learn about how they met the criteria. For example, the survey (included in the Appendix) offered an opportunity for them to expand on their ethnic identities, the community organizations and movement spaces they are a part of, as well as how they are defining social justice for themselves. Lastly, I asked them to share recommendations for Asian owned restaurants, cafes, and caterers whose food they'd like to enjoy during session, along with any dietary accommodations they needed.

#### Consent Presentation

After I received a Collaborators' response that verified they had met the requirements for the study, I met with them one-on-one or in small groups to virtually go over the consent forms I had emailed each of them. I did this in alignment with UDL's principles of equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive, and perceptible information.

After an initial discussion and introduction meeting with each collaborator, I invited them to a consent form overview presentation. These were either one-on-one or in small groups of 4 or less. In this presentation, I described the AsianCrit Collective, shared contextual positionality

(e.g., political views, ethnic identity, gender, age, and doctoral student status), purpose of this study, their role and expectations as a collaborator, my role and expectations, benefits of this study, potential risks, accessibility to the collected data, and the importance of on-going consent. I made clear throughout the study that their on-going consent is important and therefore they always had the last say in what would or wouldn't be shared in the dissertation. Similarly, during the consent overview, I let them know that there would be no consequence to withdraw from the study at any time. Throughout the study, only one collaborator withdrew due to conflicting work schedules; they withdrew before data collection started.

Because I wanted to document the study with pictures of the Collaborators, I also asked them for permission through a media release form to post pictures of them during the study on the AsianCrit Collective Instagram and to include their photos in the dissertation. Because many of them take leadership roles in their respective communities and have a relatively public presence, I had shared that if they'd like to be anonymous in the study, they would not be in photos (i.e., they would decline permission for media release). Most Collaborators gave consent for media release and use of their real names throughout the study.

#### Accessibility + Safety Agreement Survey

Next, I sent the Collaborators an Accessibility and Safety Agreement Survey. In this much briefer survey, I asked them to share any accessibility needs they had, which I used to help guide how I hosted interviews, focus group sessions, and celebrations. This survey also ask that they agree to COVID and allergy safety measures to keep one another safe during our focus group sessions. This portion of the survey was informed by initial conversations I had one-on-one with the Collaborators who have expressed concerns of COVID safety with in-person gatherings, as well as food allergies that were shared in the Introductory Screening Survey.

### Introductory Interviews

I scheduled one round of one-on-one introductory semi-structured interviews with each participant lasting between 1 to 2 hours covering a maximum of 20 questions. The goal of this interview was to better understand 1) their educational experiences in school and community settings, 2) their relationship to the intersection of their racial and gender identity, 3) their social justice perspectives, commitments, and aspirations in general and specifically in the community organizations they are a part of. I prompted questions such as “When you think back to your schooling experiences, what are some immediate thoughts or emotions that come up?”, “Across these learning spaces you’ve described, what sustained you (if anything)? What were valuable experiences where you felt seen, understood, recognized, valued, appreciated, etc.?”, and “What are the knowledges and skills around racial consciousness and resistance you hope to pass down to Asian youth in your program?”

I chose this interview structure to allow for participants to guide the conversation to what they feel is important and significant to include, while at the same time providing enough structure to elicit content-specific responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Centering community collaborators’ voices allows me to recognize and highlight their significant and voluntary contributions in and through Asian-centered community spaces. From this interview, I was able to get a better understanding of how they see themselves in relation to Asian communities, which has implications for their experiences, values, and perspectives as an Asian community educator, artists, organizer, and healers. Further, these initial interviews gave us an opportunity to build rapport before meeting and engaging in discussion with 11 other community collaborators during the focus groups/ group sessions.

### Focus Group Sessions

I hosted five two-hour long semi-structured focus group sessions. Group sessions took place across 5 consecutive Saturdays, starting May 6 and ending June 3rd, 2022. I knew it would be unrealistic to expect that all collaborators would be able to attend all 5 group sessions, due to various commitments and capacity. Therefore, I asked that they join at least three of the five sessions, while still acknowledging that unexpected plans and situations come up. At the conclusion of the group sessions, all the collaborators joined at least two sessions.

Because social justice movements and learning spaces are highly collaborative and community-oriented, it was critical to learn from community collaborators in a collective space. Further, each group session was themed through relationships (to each other, themselves, land, ancestors, and future generations). I chose these themes to ensure that each topic felt relatable to each collaborator. I also noticed, during the Introductory interviews, how frequently collaborators brought up the importance of relationships.

Each session utilized different art-based reflection activities to engage the collaborators in ways that they might see in their personal life such as food stories, altar creations, and writing love letters. I also wanted to do a few activities that would create a collective image from their individual contributions such as the constellation mapping of their relationships to one another and the autobiographical mapping on one collective map. This allowed for further bonding and community building during our time together. I utilized a variety of art modes to engage their various interests. For example, from the Introductory survey and Intro Interviews, I learned that a handful of collaborators were foodies, so I ensured that we had one session that used food as a mode of storytelling.

Lastly, I utilized tenets of AsianCrit to guide discussion topics and reflective prompts for the art creations. I structured each group session to align with tenets of AsianCrit, and intersectional Asian-centered theory. I also ensured that each art-based activity encompassed a relatable topic that allowed for personal specificities (e.g., writing a love letter to your body—everyone has a body, and everyone’s body is gendered and racialized differently).

<b>Session</b>	<b>Relatability</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Art based Activity</b>	<b>Related AsianCrit Tenets</b>
1	We live among others and communities.	Relationship to (not) so strangers	Constellation mapping of relationships	Commitments to Social Justice
2	We all have bodies	Relationship to self	Writing love letters to bodies	Intersectionality, Asianization
3	We are always somewhere	Relationship to place and land	Photovoice, autobiographical mapping	Transnational context, Strategic (Anti)essentialism
4	We all have ancestors, blood and chosen.	Relationship to ancestors	Altar creation	Asianization, (Re)constructive history, Story, theory, and praxis
5	We are implicated in the world we create for future generations	Relationship to future generations	Food stories, digital collaging	Commitment to social justice, (re)constructive history

### Art-Based Narratives

During each two-hour workshop, community participants engaged in creating art-based narratives. Community participants were still in a shared physical space but working individually to share personal stories through a creative modality. Kovach (2009) discusses how “stories are vessels for passing along teachings, medicines, and practices that can assist members of the collective. They promote social cohesion by entertaining and fostering good feeling” (p. 95). Similarly, McKinley and Brayboy (2005) mention that stories “serve as a way to orient oneself and others toward the world and life”. Kovach (2009), McKinley and Brayboy (2005), suggest that we live stories and carry them with us, influencing how we make sense of, navigate, resist, and refuse systems of oppression, as well as how we pass down the critical knowledges that sustain, protect, and foster joy within us and our communities as a move towards collective liberation.

Kovach (2009) also mentions how storytelling happens through visual symbols, song, and prayer, speaking to the variety of modes of storytelling. In the AsianCrit five-part workshop series, community collaborators utilized photovoice (photography narratives), altars, memory lane (autobiographical mapping) (Hampton, 2020), poetry, and food storytelling to engage in art-based narratives. These activities aimed to prompt the Collaborators to reflect on their personal narratives and locate themselves in larger systems of power at play. Further, these art-based narratives utilize mix modes of expressing personal stories to decenter written “formal” word as the only valuable storytelling mode (Jones & Okun, 2001).

Further, to address the research questions identifying values and hopes of Asian movement makers, I was guided by the story, theory, and praxis tenet of AsianCrit, UDL’s principle of multiple means of action and expression (Rose & Meyer, 2002), and CSP’s centering of identities, cultural knowledges, languages, and ways of knowing.

Below, I explain and offer examples of art-based reflective activities that I invited the Collaborators to engage in. I go over relationship mapping, love letter writing, memory lane (geographically mapping), altars, and food storytelling that can prompt learners to engage in critical self-reflections.

Many of these arts-based activities are exercises I've done as an educator and research. For example, in the AsianCrit course that I've co-taught, the teaching team ask students to create critical self-reflections, which are weekly assignments adapted from Washington's "Critical Reflection Posts", Chase Chen's "Pre-Class Preparation", and Paris' "Critical Reflections" assignments<sup>9</sup>. These assignments aim to prompt students to connect their personal stories and locate themselves in larger systems of power at play. Freire (1970) states, "To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it.... Human beings are not built for silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 69). In other words, he explains how reflecting on the state of the world and yourself is needed for change--for collective liberation. Furthermore, Medina (2020) states, "A critical critique invites the process of naming, identifying, and interrogating belief systems, practices, policies, and systematic structures as a means of dis-mantling and transforming" (p.118). Medina explains how critical critiques are necessary in reflecting on the ways in which systems of oppression operate and need to be abolished. Therefore, critical self-reflections, in the context of the AsianCrit course, are where we ask students to think about their own lived experiences and connect them to the systems of power that we exist in, to recognize our responsibilities and imagine ways we can take action to dismantle these systems. Further, these critical self-reflections utilize mix modes of storytelling to decenter written "formal" word as the only valuable storytelling mode (Jones & Okun, 2001).

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<sup>9</sup> Professors and scholars whose classes I've taken during my graduate studies.

## Relationship mapping

Concept mapping is a popular brainstorming tool that allows learners to visually map out and make connections between varying ideas. Relationship mapping is similar except that instead of ideas, people are at the center. While I have not seen this done in other research, I utilized this activity as an ice breaker to visually see the ways in which folks in a space are connected. In this activity, learners are asked to list their name in the middle of a piece of paper. Then, everyone posts their pieces of paper on a large poster paper. They are then asked to draw connecting lines to folks in the space they know or know of. Then, they are asked a more personal question such as “what communities are you apart of?” and to list them on their original piece of paper. Again, they are then asked to look at what others have listed and draw connections to the communities they are also apart of or know of. This activity goes on in this respective cycle with prompt becoming more personal (with the option to pass). The last question I would ask is, “what values do you hold?”. This scaffolded activity allows for learners

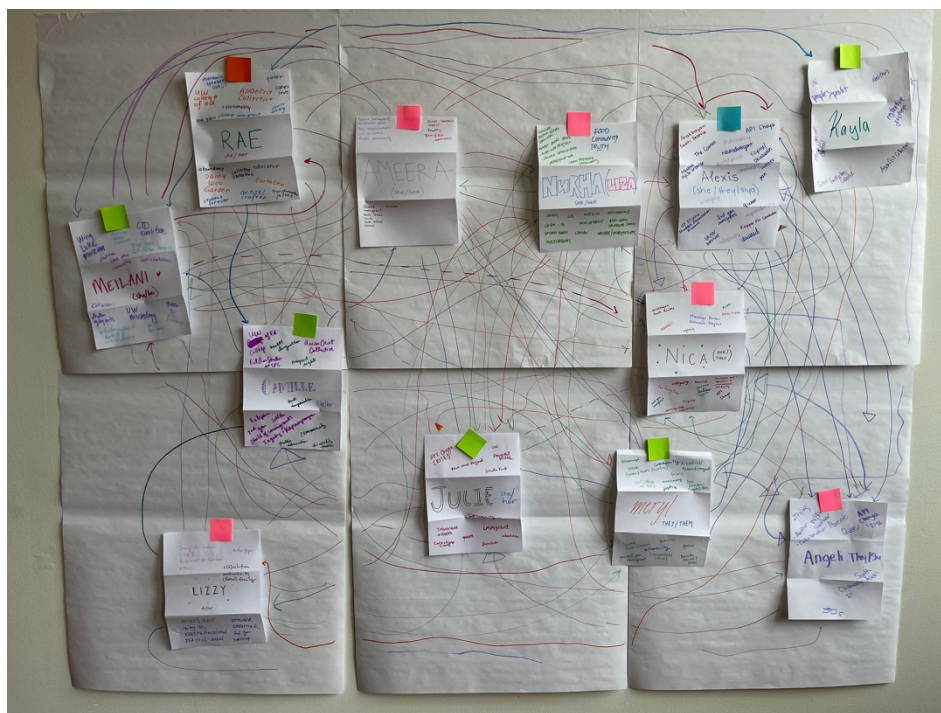


Figure 15 Relationship mapping from Session 1

to get to know each other and ultimately recognize the ways they are connected, building a familiar community. Further, this offered me initial insight to the collaborators in a space.

### Love letter writing

Love letter writing has been taken up by scholars to communicate gratitude and reverence to their communities (Wilson, Acuff, & Kraehe, 2022; Cisneros, 2021; Reyes, 2022). Further, many scholars recognize the deep love that is involved in their inherently political and critical activism (Buena Vista et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2019; Matias et al., 2022; Paris & Alim, 2014). Further, love letters have been a tool for expressing solidarity and through the framework of critical love. In other words, love in this sense can include gratitude, reverence, and critiquing for growth. Writing love letters, therefore, can be a tool to move towards liberation. In Session 2, I invited the Collaborators to write a love letter to their bodies. I prefaced the activity, noting that Our bodies often experience pain from the violence of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, homophobia, fatphobia, ableism, etc. and therefore, this may be a difficult or uncomfortable activity (Francesca, 2022). I encouraged them to only engage in this activity in ways that feel right for them, to take breaks if needed, and to remember that we and our bodies always have and continue to deserve joy, pleasure, and comfort. There was no minimum or maximum length required length of the letter and they were not required to share their letters to the group. I wrote a letter myself and shared it with everyone to offer my own vulnerability that I was asking of them. Some opted out of the activity, some shared full letters, and others shared portions of their letter.

### Memory lane

Memory lane as a method of storytelling is particularly important as we consider that wherever we are, we are somewhere. We are inseparable from place and therefore place holds many of our stories. In a previous research collaboration, Edd Hampton, one of the Black community leaders and revolutionaries in Seattle whom I worked with, suggested a method he calls memory lane. Essentially, it was a show-and-tell about locations that held significant

meaning and memories to him. So far, I have not come across a similar method; therefore, I use this term to describe for Hampton's method.

During Session 3, I offered the Collaborators two guiding prompts:

1. Please consider how your identities, (biological and/or chosen) family histories, and experiences are connected to places and spaces. This might look like tracing migration histories of your family. This might look like pinpointing "breathable" places of belonging, ease, and comfort within your current neighborhood. Please share in the description what these spaces mean to you.
2. Describe what this place means to you. How has land and place shaped you? How are they connected to your identities?

They mapped out their pinpoints on a collective Padlet map.



*Figure 16 Collective memory lane map.*

### Altar sharing

Esparza (2019) describe altars as “a place for reflection, contemplation, meditation, and prayer, and, most importantly, they provide me with an intimate space for my intentions.”

Across cultures, creating and maintaining altars is an important practice. In Buddhism, it is a way to share food with lost loves ones. Altars can also be a space to place grounding and centering items, depending on the individual. I was first introduced to this method by Kriya Velasco (2018). I had the opportunity to co-facilitate the AsianCrit course with them. In this course we asked students to share a culturally specific item and connect it to any of the topics mentioned in the course. Students would bring pieces of items created by people in their communities and families including jewelry, clothing, and blankets. Some would share trinkets that remind them of home such as toys and photographs.

In preparation for Session 4, Meryl and Angeli help me brainstorm prompts to ask the Collaborators to guide them in deciding what item to bring and place on our collective altar.

Here are the prompts folks were offered:

1. Who are the folks you want to honor?
2. How have they impacted your life and your perspectives (indirectly/directly)? What have you learned from them?
3. How can we realize and honor the dreams/visions of our ancestors?
4. What practices make you feel most connected to your ancestors? How could your altar represent those practices, and deepen your relationship with your ancestors and your traditions (past, present, and future)?
5. What was/is their favorite dish to eat or their signature dish they made at family gatherings?
6. What taste, smell, feeling, sound, visual represents them?
7. What brought/brings them joy and comfort?

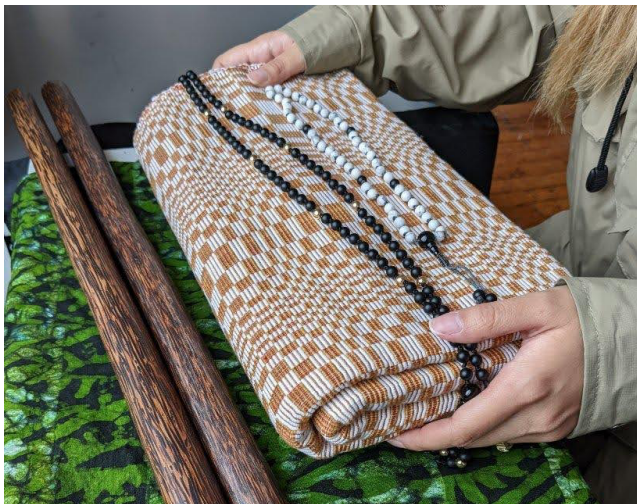


Figure 17 Alexis's altar items



Figure 18 Meilani's altar items

### Food Storytelling

Williams (2017) discusses how “food is about vulnerability; eating involves ingesting something that could harm us”. They go on to say that gathering around food creates a bond between people, encouraging them to tap into their vulnerability.

Storytelling is critical in connecting learners to the broader world and their systems of power. However, often in academic spaces, the formal “objective” writing is valued over 1st-person narratives and other modes of storytelling. From photovoice, altars, memory lane (geographically mapping), poetry, and food storytelling, learners can express their personal stories and critically reflect on these stories by interrogating systems of power.

For our fifth and final focus group session, the Collaborators were first given an opportunity to reflect individually on the follow guiding prompts of their choosing:

*“Food is life. Think about life lessons (as specific or as broad as you want) you've learned through your interaction with food. Consider your memories of planting, growing, preparing, eating, or sharing food.*

*What is a particular recipe, ingredient, meal, a spread of dishes, a particular process in cooking/baking that:*

- 1) represents a life lesson metaphorically,*
- 2) reminds you of someone/ some event/some place that has taught you a life lesson,*
- 3) hold a particular history that is important to you,*

*4) help you reconnect with your identity, your community, or your movement,  
5) has healing properties (physically, mentally, spiritually) that you need/want.  
6) or anything else you can think of directly or indirectly connected to important wisdoms you've learned, embody, hope to pass down.”*

Once they've landed on a life lesson, they were then asked to imagine that we were creating a recipe book of wisdom for future generations. They were each responsible for creating a visual representation of their food-related life lesson.

### Cultivating Space

Cultivating space throughout the 5 focus group sessions was critical to building and maintaining trust, vulnerability, validation, joy, comfort, safety, and access. To guide me in this practice, I turned to the traditions of hosting in my family and other Asian communities I'm a part of. I wanted to honor the strength of the traditions of hosting I recognized in our communities, and I also wanted to incorporate theories like AsianCrit, CSP, and UDL to further inform how I carried out practices of hosting a space and community that the Collaborators would want to be a part of. Moore and Paris (2021) offer the phrase “chosen spaces” to describe environments and communities where folks “choose to participate in and have the agency to refuse their membership in.” Below, I describe the intentional steps I took to cultivate a chosen space with and for the Collaborators.

### Accessibility

Framing for accessibility was informed by Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This included considering physical, learning, emotional, and economic accessibility.

During the planning stages of this research, I had researched various ADA accessible<sup>10</sup> gathering spaces that would be accessible to the Collaborators. Luckily, one of those spaces, Kasama Space, a 1,600 square foot Filipina-owned studio space in SODO (South of the Dome or South of Downtown) district was hosting a raffle for 12 hours of free studio time. In applying, I had shared my proposal for this study with the owner and they wanted to further support granting us over 20 hours of free studio time to host the focus group sessions. Although it is largely an industrial neighborhood, Kasama Space was close to many South Seattle neighborhoods in which many Communities of Color reside. Street parking was free, and I made available an option to request reimbursement for parking (in the parking lot next to the building), bus, ride-share costs to get to and from the space. Further, AsianCrit Collective teammates and I coordinated carpooling options.



*Figure 19 Kasama Space. Photo on the right is the kitchen space where we placed meals.*

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<sup>10</sup> Many disability justice activists and scholars name that American Disability Act (ADA) “accessibility” is often not fully accessible . Pionke (2017) calls for accessibility beyond ADA compliance and spaces must consider Universal Design for Learning principles.

There was a bathroom on the premises, in which I ensured to remove Kasama's incenses each session to accommodate folks who requested that the space be low scent. Further, based on the collaborators' feedback and named access needs, I printed out my presentation slides and used a mic and speaker system. For folks that were sick and still wanted to join or in general could not come in person, I provided a Zoom option for them to join remotely with live captions. I also shared content warnings for activities that may have been particularly difficult to grapple with such as inviting them to write a love letter to their body. For folks who could not make it to a session, I would make a brief (10-15 minute) recorded summary presentation and include these videos in a debrief email. Finally, before I started Outro Interviews with anyone, I created an All-Session Summary, which was a chart and summary of all the topics, discussion prompts, activities, transcripts for all group sessions. Within this document, I linked PowerPoints, recorded sessions, online activities (e.g., memory lane art activity was documented on Padlet), and the recorded summary presentations.

#### COVID safety

This research occurred during the ongoing COVID pandemic. While this pandemic impacted all communities in specific ways, it was particularly racialized by white supremacy in ways that sparked a rise in anti-Asian violence. It also exposed at a large scale the pitfalls of capitalism and ableism to corporate America, though continues to be dismissed and ignored. This is evidenced by the continuous misinformation shared and lack of safety measures taken by both the 45th and 46th presidential administrations and CDC. Further, though masks mandates have been lifted one year into the pandemic and the declaration of the pandemic was nationally lifted on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the national death toll is currently well-over 1 million, and at the time of writing this report, over 2,000 people have died from COVID in the US just this week (People's CDC, 2023). Between the on-going COVID deaths, the disregard of disabled folks' health and

lives, the individual attacks on Asian elders, and mass murders of Asian community members, cultivating a space that offered accessible options and prioritized their safety was critical. They created spaces like these for their communities and the youth they engage in learning with, which is often significantly different than traditional school spaces.

Prior to the first session, the collaborators were asked to fill out an Introduction and Accessibility survey. In this survey, they were asked to wear masks when they were not eating or drinking in the space. They were also invited to name any access needs for our time together. The studio itself had large windows that were propped out to allow for airflow. I brought my personal air purifier and ran it each session. Masks were required to attend (except for taking them off to eat and drink) and reminder flyers were posted at the entrance of the studio. Sanitizer and N95 masks were provided at the entrance as well. I also rearranged tables and seating to space out the collaborators.

#### *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy*

As mentioned in the Theoretical Framing chapter, CSP was used to guide my praxis as a hosting researcher. Informed by CSP, I made sure that the curriculum was sustaining their racial identity as well as their intersecting identities. Guiding prompts of individual reflection and group discussion including questions like “How has land and place shaped you? How are they connected to your identities?”

Beyond the curriculum, I also provided snacks that were popular in many Asian American households such as lychee jelly cups and tamarind candy. I also asked the Collaborators what types of nostalgic Asian snacks they’d like to see and visited Asian owned grocery stores like Fou Lee’s, Uwajimaya, H-Mart, and Go-Go’s. Typical to many Asian community celebrations and gatherings, food is essential— meals were catered by local Asian owned restaurants. I asked collaborators beforehand in the Introductory Survey if they had

recommendations for their favorite Asian owned restaurants they would want to eat during our sessions. One of the most popularly requested Asian owned restaurants listed was ChuMinh Tofu, which is a Vietnamese, Buddhist, and woman owned vegan restaurant located in the International District, home to many Asian businesses and communities. ChuMinh Tofu not only has tasty food, but their values also align with many of the collaborators in the space; they provided and continue provide free food and other supplies to folks experiencing houselessness since the start of the pandemic, while Seattle Police Department continued violent “sweeps” of houseless encampments.



*Figure 21 Nica washing dishes after group session.*

While I was intentional about how I set up the sessions, it’s important to note the ways the collaborators contributed to making the space culturally sustaining as well. One of the restaurants that catered one of our sessions was Salima’s Specialties, owned by one of the collaborators’ family. Although prepared to pay for the food, the Collaborator refused to accept payment; this also happened during an interview that I hosted at a cafe as well. While it can be seen as a humorous practice, and not exclusively an Asian practice, “polite fighting” over



*Figure 20 Photo taken by Nurhaliza. Tray of mango sticky rice gifted and shared during our fifth and final group session.*

a bill is one way to show respect, gratitude, and love. Further, although I did my best to insist that they do not help clean up after each session, many collaborators stayed behind to help breakdown, even wash dishes, and pack “baon” or leftovers when a session ended in containers we collectively brought from home.

#### Outro Interviews

Lastly, I conducted a one-on-one semi-structured interview with each participant to talk through their collected CSRs. With this interview, I was able to ask participants to elaborate on their creative critical self-reflections and talk through their representations. This ensured that during that analysis phase of the research that I interpreted their creative storytelling accurately. I also asked follow-up questions that may not have been addressed in their CSRs.

With permission, interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to ensure specific transcriptions.

#### Compensation

So often, research has been and continues to be extractive of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities to profit the researcher and universities and rarely the communities that made their research possible. I named this during the Consent Presentation. Yet, at the time the study started, I did not have access to funds to compensate the Collaborators, which I was upfront about. I did have access to \$1,500 for meals donated by the AsianCrit Collective members from funds they received for a providing a faculty professional development workshop. Remaining hosting costs (primarily remaining costs for meals) were paid out of pocket. At the end of the study, I had spent roughly \$1,000 out of pocket. Prior, during, and after the research was completed, I had been actively applying for grants and fellowships to reimburse myself and to financially compensate the Collaborators. Gratefully, I was awarded one fellowship and two

grants that allowed me to do so. I was able to provide a gratitude gift bag (that costed roughly \$50 each). This gift bag included artwork purchased from various artists in the group, a personalized thank you card, items from various and majority local Asian-owned businesses. All the Collaborator received items that was given to everyone and at least one personally specific item. For example, everyone received planted based salves made from a Seattle-based Khmer-owned business, Neary Alchemy and gift cards to West Seattle-based Black and Filipina owned



Figure 22 Items that were gifted to the Collaborators.

shop, Good Sister. For more personalized gifts, folks who I knew had dogs, received personalized doggie treats made by Everett-based Chinese owned business, Skyler Dog Bakery. It's important to note that some of businesses that I purchased from offered donations (e.g., "Have Your Eaten Yet" cards from Hourglass Industry) or discounts in support of the study and the

Collaborators. Additionally, I

allocated \$1,000 to each collaborator and as a small token of gratitude for their time and expertise. \$100 was also given to each collaborator from donated funds from a grant one Collaborator received and shared.

### *Data analysis*

At the conclusion of the gathering of narratives with the Collaborators, I ended up with over 50 hours of audio, 12 survey responses, and 12 sets of 5 individual art-based narratives to

review. Because the research questions call for being grounded in the values and hopes of the Collaborators, I took an inductive coding method for analysis to allow for themes to emerge from the narratives of the Collaborators. Below, I explain how I arrived at the findings using thematic memoing, and the practices of community validation (Smith, 1999).

### Coding

All 24 interviews and 5 group sessions' recordings were auto transcribed using Otter.ai. Recognizing that there would be errors in the transcriptions, I reviewed transcriptions while listening to the recordings making any necessary edits and to notice the Collaborators tone, energy, and mood that wouldn't typically be caught in transcriptions alone. I then gathered the 12 Introductory Survey responses, and the 24 interviews (Intro and Outro) and 5 group sessions transcripts and utilized inductive coding. In alignment with addressing the research questions that ask about the Collaborators' values and hopes, I highlighted portions of the transcriptions where collaborators were speaking of their perspectives and actions, to identify potential values they hold. I also highlighted specific statements around their wishes for themselves, their communities, and future generations.

I then used thematic memoing (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to reflect on what I reviewed. In other words, after reviewing the gathered stories of the Collaborators, I would take reflective notes and distill them into three summative points per transcript. After taking thematic memos across the gathered narratives (the survey responses, and the audio and transcripts of the interviews and group sessions), I noticed three major value and hope-based themes emerge that I expand on in the following chapter. As mentioned in the Introduction, one's values show up in how we talk, what we talk about, how we move in the world, etc. Therefore, thematic memoing is helpful when every sentence the Collaborators say feels highlight-able, significant, and

revealing of a value or hope they have. With this much gathered narratives to review, this method of analysis supported me in reflecting on key takeaways.

### Community Validation

Further, I reviewed collaborators' created art pieces individually, and then alongside the Outro Interview audio and transcriptions. As a reminder, the Outro Interview invited the Collaborators to reflect on their experience of creating their artwork. This interview served as narrative sharing as well as community validation (Smith, 1999) to ensure that I would interpret their art accurately. Further, during the writing process, each collaborator was sent a Google Doc with quotes I would be citing to support the analysis. Further each collaborator had access to a draft of the dissertation for any final edits to their quotes and art. Finally, we collectively created a zine that includes vignettes, photos, and community collaborators' art-based narratives) and portions of the interview and focus group transcriptions to share with them and their community spaces as a way to "return what [we] learn to the people" (King, 2017).

Throughout this chapter, I've discussed how I built relationships with the Collaborators, prompted narrative sharing, created a chosen space, and made sense of the Collaborators' shared narratives. I explained how these practices of hosting a research study was informed by my experiences from hosting with the Asian communities I'm a part of and from AsianCrit, CSP, and UDL theories guiding this research. In the next chapter, I dive into what I learned from the Collaborators' narratives about their values and hopes.

## **Findings/ Learnings**

After analyzing Intro and Outro Interviews, group session discussions, and art created by the collaborators, I identified three major findings: 1) the personal is political, 2) intergenerational care, and 3) cultivating culture of safety, choice, and joy. The personal is political theme describes the Collaborators' political meaning making, orientations, and commitments based on their personal experiences. They discuss how their initiation, involvement, and commitment to social justice is heavily motivated by their experiences as folks who are racialized, gendered, and otherwise read under white supremacy. Further, their experiences within their communities that continue to resist and refuse investments in white supremacy impact their political beliefs. The second theme is regarding intergenerational care. In this section, the Collaborators discuss their acknowledgement of the need for and/or active steps towards disrupting cycles of intergenerational harm and trauma, as well as their desire for healing and prevention or minimization of further harm for themselves, their elders, and for future generations. The third and final theme centers on cultivating culture. This section discusses the Collaborators hopes and desires of spaces, societies, and worlds that prioritize and cultivate a culture of safety, choice, and joy that they need and want for themselves and others. These three themes emerged across various personal narrative sources including Introductory Survey, Intro and Outro interviews, and group sessions.

### *1. The personal is political*

The first theme is that the personal is political for the Collaborators. The phrase “the personal is political” is a popular phrase in feminist studies. Here, I refer to political or politics as their perspectives or how they read the world, which are reflective of their values. As the Black feminist Combahee River Collective (1983) stated, “Our politics evolve from a healthy love for

ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work.”

Similarly for the Collaborators, it became apparent that their politics were heavily influenced by their experiences as Asian, non-binary folks and women living in the US, most of whom are queer, neurodivergent and/or living with disabilities. Within this theme, three subthemes are identified as *liberation* being a primarily political orientation and commitment, *recognizing and taking responsibility* to contribute to changing society as necessary, and *continuing our ancestors' legacies* to guide their liberatory praxis.

#### 1A. Liberation

As organizers, community educators, artists, and healers with a commitment to social justice, discussions of their politics came up in every discussion. I quickly learned in their Introductory Surveys that many of the Collaborators found the phrase “social justice” too vague to describe their commitments to social change. Instead, liberation was more specific in describing the aims of their politics. For example, when explicitly asked what social justice means to them, Ammara, a queer Khmer child of refugees, shared that it “*means embodying liberation*”. They engage their politics of liberation through how they carry themselves in the world. This section discusses liberation as the first subtheme of the personal is politic major theme.

Throughout this paper, I use collective liberation and liberation interchangeably, recognizing that liberation is inherently collective. Informed by Black revolutionary scholars such as Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor and Angela Davis (2016), liberation can be defined as state in which all peoples and lands are free from all interlocking systems of oppression. For the Collaborators, this topic came up often across settings, and with varying overlapping descriptors. For example, anti-imperialism and abolition were common words and topics that came up. In this

theme, I am combining them not to suggest that they are interchangeable, but rather that they all fall under aspects of liberation. Anti-imperialism addresses a stance against colonization, military forces, and empire building across the globe. Further, abolition calls for the dismantling of systems of oppression and institutions that exist to carry them out, such as the police, in order to build something different (e.g., Kelley, 2016). Collectively, these additional lenses offer a more detailed definition of liberation--- that we are all oppressed under white supremacy, colonization, patriarchy and imperialism and therefore intersectional, global, and cross-racial solidarity is required to dismantle all systems of oppression. Further, these lenses also recognize the importance of transformative justice, a move towards healing and away from punishment, harm, and shame; this includes the abolition of policing, prisons, and the military.

In the following three examples, the Collaborators discuss how their lived experiences informed their politics, as shown through their liberatory perspectives and actions. For example, Alexis, an organizer living with disabilities, names, “*My commitment is deeply personal*”. In their Introductory interview, they discussed the evolution of their politics, describing how their commitment to disability justice was ignited because of their own experiences with their disabilities. In the search for community and understanding of their experiences, they learned about capitalism and disability justice. They further connected their learning to their mom’s experiences as well. They go on to say,

*“My mother was flown from the Philippines to Miami, Florida on a flight with other Filipino nurses in 1982. My whole life I told this story about how the Filipino nurses on that flight became my godmothers, and their children became my godbrothers and godsisters. Sounds incredible, right? Then in the last few years, I found out, oh, wow, it’s not as pure and precious of a story as I thought. At the core of it, the Philippine Labor Export Policy (LEP) of 1974 led to my mom’s labor getting exported to the U.S. The dictator Ferdinand Marcos decided that the Filipino people didn’t need these highly skilled nurses and that a financial relationship with the American government was more important. I’m 125 grand in debt from graduating pharmacy school. In order to become a Doctor of Pharmacy, I essentially paid for the opportunities to give free labor as a*

*pharmacist intern. I had to fight for disability accommodations in pharmacy school, and it costs a lot of money to keep up with medical appointments just to prove disability. It's a struggle to continuously ask for help in academia, and it made me realize that it isn't a coincidence that I went undiagnosed with ADHD-CT and C-PTSD for so long. When I started looking into the history of disability in America, I found out that my ability to graduate pharmacy school was because disabled activists pushed for the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. I realized that everything is connected. These government policies dictate our value as human beings, and if we don't start fighting for what we need and deserve, the government will keep extracting our labor and resources just like they strived for with the Philippine Labor Export Policy (LEP) of 1974."*

As they speak, Alexis makes clear the connections to their experiences and how it relates to the experiences of their mother under interlocking systems of capitalism and colonization. They continued to say,

*"It helps me realize the fact that capitalism has normalized monetizing someone's life—someone's ability to output work, and it's so dehumanizing. Thinking of the millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who send the majority of their paycheck back home to the Philippines to feed their families and how they never get to see them."*

Ending on a frustrating note, Alexis experiences of living with disabilities in a capitalistic society, not being able to find an accessible job placement after an incredible investment in pharmacy school, and the ways the white supremacy views her mom as imported labor, are all efforts to spirit murder and position oppressed peoples as cogs in an empire-building machine.

Relatedly, during Session 2, when asked how the collaborators define love as a warmup activity, Julie, a Taiwanese and Hakka writer and poet, wrote, "love is an antidote to fear but can be a friend to rage." This is a helpful lens to understand Alexis's frustration when reflecting on structures that have caused her and her mom harm. Alexis' frustration of these structures and love for herself and community propelled her into action as an organizer and healer. She states,

*"What revolutionized me was realizing how much we're conditioned to think that it's lazy to need rest and shameful to need help from each other. A lot of the digging that I did led to capitalism and colonization being the main source of all of my problems and my family's problems. I started my research and participation in politics mostly online since I'm an introvert and only recently moved to Washington state in 2020 at the height of the pandemic. Online spaces created by Asian activists like Yejin Lee (@yejin\_lee) and Ienna (@decolonialbulaklak) on Instagram gave me a community that understood the impact of colonization on our people. I learned that Ienna was part of Anakbayan, a Filipino youth*

*organization fighting for national liberation & genuine democracy in the Philippines. Now I've found my political home with Anakbayan South Seattle – my kasamas keep me grounded and support me in this beautiful movement.”*

Alexis's experience with her disabilities in an ableist society informed her engagement in community as an organizer and development of her anti-colonial politics. She currently is an ADHD consultant and organizer with Anakbayan South Seattle, an anti-imperialist community organization advocating for the liberation of the Philippines.

Relatedly, Nica, who is also a Filipino organizer with Anakbayan South Seattle, brought up in a group discussion reflecting on the autobiographical mapping activity, the ongoing fight against the U.S. backed the Marcos regime in the Philippines. They said,

*“...if I, as someone who exists and lives on Coast Salish land, am fighting for the freedom of my homeland in the Philippines then I also have to be fighting for the freedom of the Indigenous peoples of this land that I'm settled in to also have that freedom, and to also have their land back...”*

They recognize the interconnectedness between the oppression of Indigenous communities transnationally, and therefore the interconnectedness between the liberation of all Indigenous communities. Ammara echoes Nica as she emphasizes the importance of *“honoring the interconnectedness of the world and our intersectional identities/experiences”*. They explain that solidarity is global, cross-racial, and across identities, an aspect that is critical to liberatory movements, as all systems of oppression are linked. As Representative Ilhan Omar (2020) tweeted, “If your ‘freedom’ relies on my oppression, then neither of us are free.”

Further, Ammara also considers how their community's experience with genocide and displacement is interconnected to the genocide of Indigenous communities in the US. They explain,

*“ultimately, we have the same systems that are impacting us, just in different ways, the US militarism and imperialism that caused my family to be displaced and cause us to our community to become refugees and have to flee here is the same system that has*

*committed past+ongoing genocide against Indigenous peoples and continue to displace, to harm to kill. And so, it's like, how can we find those connections and build collective solidarity, to challenge and dismantle the system and create something better from it?"*

While they make clear that oppressive systems like US militarism, imperialism, and colonization are linked, they also share that our experiences of the impacts are also linked. Therefore, solidarity allows us to have collective power to disrupt and liberate us from these systems that thrive off our displacement and death. Through the questions she poses, one can notice how her analysis of her experiences are informing how she will engage in her praxis.

Discussing their identity at the intersection of gender and race, Angeli, a Desi genderqueer survivor and parent, discusses how their experience with childhood trauma led them to seek resources and community that addressed gender-based violence. Yet they described these spaces as “overwhelmingly white.” It wasn’t until joining API Chaya, an organization that is led by and serves Asian and Pacific Islander survivors of gender-based violence, that Angeli described feeling a sense of “wholeness”, and a place where they were able to explore their racial, ethnic, and disability identities. They go on to say that “*I think API Chaya was something that I was searching for, really for my whole life.*” Angeli’s experiences with childhood trauma and being engaged in white spaces influenced the ways they’ve searched and served their intersectional community. To date, Angeli has been an organizer at API Chaya for 14 years.

Throughout these examples, Collaborators have shared their personal experiences as linked to their politics and commitment to liberation. As folks from across the Diaspora, their experiences have been impacted by global structures of oppression such as imperialism, colonization, and capitalism. These experiences influenced how they read the world and what they consequently strive for liberation. Their politics as anti-imperialist, abolitionist, anti-capitalist, and so on, impact how they move in the world and the intentional choices they make

to move towards liberation and the recognition of their collective struggle and need to be in solidarity.

### 1B. Recognizing and Taking Responsibility

Building from the previous section, the next subtheme that illustrates major theme that the personal is political is recognizing and taking responsibility. Not only are the Collaborators seeking liberation from all systems of oppression, but they also have repeatedly shared that they recognize their own responsibility in taking action to create a liberatory world. Meryl, a Desi and Assamese genderfluid community educator, stated, *“It is collaborative work that I believe is everyone’s work.”* They name that everyone has a role in pursuing liberation and therefore, they recognize they are a part of the collaboration to dismantle systems of oppression.

In thinking about her own person responsibility to change, Ammara asks with an urgent curiosity,

*“I think, for me, kind of my role in trying to understand that really big web, is to start my work with my personal work with relationships, so changing relationships to self, and what is that? And how that ripples out? To? How I’m changing my relationships with people as well as to land.”*

She looks inward and reflects on what action steps they can commit to as an individual who believes in an anti-imperialist perspective. Ammara’s statement mirrors the concept of fractals (brown, 2017) and how the small parts (our interpersonal relationships) make up a whole (society). According to brown (2017), what we practice on a small scale contributes to what emerges at a large scale. In other words, our interpersonal relationships create and mimic society at large. Ammara’s praxis for a liberatory future is practiced in their daily moments and relationships. They model what they hope we collectively can cultivate. They go on to say,

*“How can you— how can we share that and, you know, teach that to other people and help them learn these new ways of being? And then also on the flip side, it’s like, how do we challenge colonial institutions that are underlying all of this? So how can we*

*challenge the ways in which, you know, the US and its military has been spread out all across the world?”*

Early in her sentence, she catches herself saying “how can you” and changes her question to “how can we”; in this rephrasing she is implicating herself in the responsibility and she acknowledges that it is a collective effort to dismantle oppressive systems.

Similarly, when responded to the prompt of what it means to be in solidarity with Indigenous folks in the US, Angeli shares that,

*“I think of, in all of the movement works that were connected to, there's always opportunities to connect it to Indigenous sovereignty. That rings true for, like environmental justice, or gender-based harm for like, every everything, there's always the opportunity to try to make work alive and embodied.”*

Here, Angeli suggests that there is a choice to opt-in to solidarity with Indigenous communities and consequently, there is a responsibility to take up that work and live it out every day.

Additionally, Nurhaliza, a Cham organizer and daughter of refugees, echoes what most Collaborators brought up at some point in the study when she reflects on how her positionality informs how she sees herself as responsible in an effort to move towards a liberatory future. She says,

*“As an Indigenous Southeast Asian Muslim woman and immigrant, part of Gen Z, has grown up in South Seattle, I have had to unlearn and learn a lot about upholding the model minority myth that works to pit minority communities against each other under white supremacy.”*

She alludes to how different aspects of her identity positions her to be privileged and oppressed under white supremacy and how important it is to critically reflect on the ways she has internalized false narratives. She makes clear it is a responsibility, given her identities and the experiences that come with those identities, to disrupt harmful perspectives and structures that uphold those perspectives.

Along the lines of Nurhaliza's inward reflection, Lizzy, a Korean and white woman, shares the importance of "*transforming ourselves so that we can move forward into a new world that is equitable, educated, and peaceful, so we can prevent ourselves as much as is possible from doing further harm to others.*" Lizzy acknowledges each person's capacity to cause harm and consequently, there is a responsibility to transformational growth to disrupt a society that allows and normalizes harm. As a landscape architect artist, environmentalist, and community educator, one can notice the ways she is intentional about how her choices impact others. She leads WILD, a youth program that partners with local restaurants to compost food waste and use it for the Danny Woo Garden, an intergenerational growing and harvesting space that provides food for families in Chinatown/International District.

Like with all the Collaborators, Meryl's politics evolved and homed in over time with their experiences, yet their sense of responsibility was consistent. When asked about their political journey, Meryl discusses how their introduction to learning about veganism in school prompted them to feel they had agency and power. They said,

*"What appealed to me was that I kind of recognized that I had some political power, I guess. And the way that the world is--- it didn't just have to be this way. I could do something. And that was really exciting."*

They also said, "*I think the veganism thing, which I have ultimately, left that community, but you know, you still have clear ties to, I think, lead really well into environmental justice.*" Meryl describes how their exposure to this sense of agency with veganism led them to pursue environmental justice. At the start of this study, Meryl had recently graduated with a master's in education with a focus on environmental justice.

Considering that the Collaborators are change makers, it makes sense that they all feel a sense of calling and responsibility to practice what they preach. Their practice as organizers,

community educators, healers, and artists are influenced by their understanding of their positionality, the power of solidarity, and their acknowledgment of their own power.

### 1C. Continuing Our Ancestors' Legacies

While it's clear that the Collaborators find responsibility in being enactors of liberatory change, it's important to recognize the ways they are also continuing the legacies of their ancestors. In this subtheme, their stories of their blood, more-than-human, cultural, religious, and political ancestors continue to inform how they show up for present and future generations. For example, during our Outro interview Ameera, an Indian, Malayali-Tamilian, and Hyderabad, Hindu trans woman and educator, reflected on writing a love letter to her body. She said,

*"I think especially again, being trans, I've never had adequate representation in my life growing up, especially with my own culture and my ethnic background. It's not really talked about in my culture, even though in my religion, we have goddesses who are trans, but thanks to colonization, that's all kind of been buried away. So, it took a long time for me to take up space in my ethnic community. So just seeing that there's kids out there who are struggling with the same thing that I did, and who would love to have probably seen someone like me, up there on stage. That's something that really motivates me to take up space now. And one thing that I do like to do is, I like to be very unapologetic now."*

Ameera turns to her religious history, pre-colonization, to consider how powerful representation is for trans youth. This informs how she wants to take up space in service of future generations.

Similarly, Ammara looks to her ancestors to get curious and reflective about what it would take for this society to transform into a liberatory one. For example, in preparation for the fourth group session, where we co-created our collective altar, I offered the Collaborators prompts to support them in deciding what item(s) to bring. I asked questions like, "What practices make you feel most connected to your ancestors? How could your altar represent those practices, and deepen your relationship with your ancestors and your traditions (past, present, and future)?" During our group session, Ammara reflected on the flower medicine they made and placed on the altar:

*“I'm learning about how in my lineage with my grandmother, and her ancestors, they were healers back in the homeland. And I think that was really meaningful to me, and especially because when I hear my dad's stories about how he survived genocide, he told me about how it was really because of my grandma, his mom, because she knew all of these remedies, all of these ways to support people when they were going through starvation and malnourishment.”*

She goes on to discuss and offer gratitude to plant ancestors that her healing ancestors have been in relationship with to heal her family and community. They conclude their reflection posing reflective questions such as,

*“What does it mean to live in reciprocity and abundance, and also honoring, these Indigenous ways of knowing and also of just communities that our communities they've always known this? And if you go back, what are those relationships? before colonization?”*

She also asks, *“what does it mean to create these thriving relationships with the land and each other?”* From these reflective questions, we get a glimpse of Ammara’s meaning making from her ancestral stories and informs her praxis as a healer who works with plant medicine.

In addition to religious, blood, and more-than-human ancestors, Meilani, a Chinese American queer woman, community organizer, artist, and educator, discusses political ancestors. In her initial introductory survey, where I asked her to describe what social justice meant to her, she stated, *“I draw my Asian American lineage from the anti-imperialist, anti-racist organizers of the Asian American movement.”* In this quote, she is referring specifically to the long history of anti-imperialist resistance of Asian America. One can look to, for example, the solidarity demonstrated by Asian America’s opposition to the Vietnam War, alongside many Black and Brown communities (Wallace, 2017). Maeda (2009) states that there were Asian American coalitions that “advocated opposition to U.S. imperialism both at home and abroad, and it connected the oppression of Asians in the United States to the prosecution of the war in Viet Nam.” (p.97). Further, US and European imperialism has and continues to perpetrate violence against many Asian countries and beyond. This history is personal to Meilani, and she uses these

stories to inform her theory and praxis as a community educator and organizer, most notably with CID Coalition that works to protect Chinatown/International District residents from displacement by a rapidly gentrifying city.

From this first major theme, I provided examples that the personal is political for the Collaborators. These examples were broken up into three supporting subthemes. The first subtheme is liberation, or the Collaborator's commitments to liberation, encompassing their anti-imperialism and abolitionist perspectives. The second subtheme of recognizing and taking responsibility showed the ways the Collaborators named that they had a role to play in dismantling systems of oppression and moving towards a liberatory future. Further, the third subtheme of continuing our ancestors' legacies, was a pattern that showcased the ways the Collaborators carry their ancestors (blood, more-than-human, cultural, religious, and political) with them in their work towards liberation for all.

## *2. Intergenerational and Intersectional Care*

As the Collaborators carry their ancestors with them, they also carry the trauma and the impacts of the trauma that has been passed down to them as a result of existing in a society that has enforced and upheld white supremacist, cis-heteropatriarchy, and colonial structures for generations. Trauma can show up physically, psychologically, and through internalization of systems of oppression, as evidenced through the Collaborators examples below. Further, considering the intersectional identities of the Asian non-binary and women collaborators, many of whom are also neurodivergent, living with disabilities, and/or queer, it is important to acknowledge the continuous violence and trauma they experience as targets of multiple interlocking systems of oppression. This trauma may be firsthand, second hand, and/or generational. While in this study we talked about painful experiences, we did so with

intentionality and care and never as the central piece but rather a necessary context to hold while concurrently learning the active steps and complex visions they have for themselves and communities. For example, prompts for activities and discussions never asked explicitly about painful or traumatic experiences, rather, they were broad enough questions that asked about what their experiences were in a certain setting, what places, people, moments were significant to them, and what their hopes and dreams are. These types of prompts allowed for discussion of trauma but did not center it, allowing the Collaborators an option to share as little or as much as they'd like about painful experiences. Beyond my role as a facilitator, the Collaborators also moved with intention and care with one another in their group discussions. Julie speaks to this experience during her outro interview. I asked Julie what it was like to be in a space with the other 11 Collaborators. She said,

*"I think, in general, the way everyone spoke to each other with this type of care, that was something more than politeness.... it's beyond that. Which is kind of a strange feeling when you don't know them. It's like, oh, I can feel like I don't just have to be polite, and we can you know, we're talking about real things that are in some of the things are, you know, very deep or even traumatic sometimes, or on the flip side, very healing, and those were all held in a space that's beyond politeness. So, that was a very unique feeling. And then, specifically, I think there were things like, oh, I don't have to over explain this. You know, I can, we can we're talking about all these deep things or whatever. But I also I don't have to put a bunch of caveats on it or put a bunch of explanatory commas in it or something. You know, I can talk about the deep thing and have I guess in some cases, shortcuts in language, you know, you just say something, and people say, Yeah, I know exactly what you're referring to. you just use two words, but you're referring to this deep well of context and emotion and relationships."*

As Julie mentions, there was a comfort in her ability to share about traumatic experiences because we moved with care that existed beyond cordiality. So, in this subtheme, I provide evidence of the intergenerational care the Collaborators desire and practice. As defined for this section, intergenerational and intersectional care encompasses the acknowledgment, disruption, and healing of intergenerational trauma and harm. I highlight the Collaborators' active steps and

complex visions of intergenerational care in two subthemes: 1) disrupting intergenerational harm, and 2) naming the need of structural mental health access.

### 2A. Disrupting Intergenerational + Intersectional Harm

As shown in a previous subtheme of recognizing and taking responsibility for liberation, the Collaborators take steps to disrupt intergenerational harm caused by oppressive structures such as fatphobia, homophobia, and patriarchy. A couple examples from Collaborators came up during our second group session. During this session, we wrote love letters to our bodies, considering all the ways our bodies are read under white supremacy and all the ways we care, appreciate, and celebrate our bodies. Considering the intimate nature of the activity, I did not ask folks to share their letters to the group; instead, I offered the option to share out reflections of our letters through prompts such as, “How do you take up space in the work with communities? What lessons have you learned from your body about taking up space? What lessons have you learned that you’d would like to pass down regarding taking up space to the next generation of folks who hold your racial, ethnic, and gender identities, as well as the multitude of other identities you hold?” Meilani, whose is mixed race Chinese and whose mother and paternal grandmother are Chinese, shared,

*“there's that disconnect in that generation because my mom, they very much value skinniness, and a white supremacist version of what a woman's body should look like. And so she's always put that on herself. But she's put it on me too.”*

While she feels the pressure of white beauty standards that her mom perpetuates, Meilani also recognizes the ways her mother also feels this pressure. Consequently, she recognizes a need to address and disrupt this harm in her teaching practice with youth. In reference to the youth Meilani teaches, she says,

*“We need to be talking about what the fashion industry does to people. And so, whenever we were talking about fashion, I always brought in models and designers that were breaking out of that. People that-- their bodies look different than what we typically see.”*

Meilani took action through offering representation of various body sizes for the next generation as an act of disrupting the fatphobia that was passed down to her from the previous generation (i.e., her mother). She continued, *“that has been more revolutionary for me just to cleanse my social media of the ideal, you know, and just find people that I resonate with.”* Not only is she breaking the cycle of trauma for the next generation, but she also is active in addressing that harm she experienced. In this sense, she is enacting intergenerational care by healing her trauma and preventing that trauma from being passed down.

During the same group discussion about taking up space and lessons we’ve learned from our bodies that we want to pass down, JM, a queer, non-binary, first generation Malaysian Chinese immigrant stated, *“I feel like as an Asian AFAB<sup>11</sup> person, just a lot of my healing is around how not to sacrifice myself for, for the family or for the community.”* JM names a reflection of disrupting harm for themselves through the act of healing. They go on to say,

*“I’m 40. So I feel like I experienced some stuff with you know, growing up in a really traditional Asian family, and just being a queer person, you know, not hetero and all the ways that that has shaped how I’ve moved in my life, and really wanting to, I mean, in my work in organizing, just really want to build relationships with younger Asian folks to be there. I didn’t grow up with role models of how that can be possible, right? And there’s so much unnecessary heartbreak, like, severance, you know, that came from needing to assert who I am.”*

They share that their desire to be a queer Asian elder and role model to younger generations. JM also implies that the pain or trauma of severed familial or communal relationships for one’s own preservation is avoidable and a practice that can be disrupted for younger Asian folks.

JM continues,

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<sup>11</sup> Acronym referring to someone who was “assigned female at birth”.

*“At this point in my life to just reflecting ‘were they healthier ways or other ways to really affirm who I am alongside relationships with a family?’ I think when queerness is read as white, it really makes it hard to understand how to be who you are in this really traditional context, right? Where you can still love the people who don't see you completely. And that love is such a big part of who you are. So, I don't know that's one of - I think just expanding the vocabulary around queerness coming out, you know, connections of family or community chosen family all these things... it's something I want to be an active process of conversation with younger folks and older others to.”*

Here, JM reflects on the complexities of loving people that may have harmed you or caused you pain. They name a desire to disrupt the traumatic practice of relationship severance with people you love and to be that bridge for younger and older generations.

In line with JM's aspiration to be a role model for queer Asian youth, Alexis revisits throughout the study the importance of sharing personal stories as a neurodivergent Filipina and Okinawan survivor of domestic violence and sexual assault, living with disabilities. She explains that sharing personal stories is a way to be a “trauma cycle breaker”, an identity she names when introducing herself in the Intro Survey. In her intro interview, I asked, “What have you learned from your relationships with other Asian non-binary folks and women?” She shared, *“What's coming up for me is the Atlanta shootings, and just a lot of heartache. A lot of trauma around simply existing as an Asian woman is--I mean, it's a challenge.”* She breaks here with a subtle laughter that expresses disappointment and an acknowledgment of the absurdity of this reality. She goes on to say,

*“It's super difficult...and what I've been learning a lot is that we have to...face those things. And not brush them under the rug, because if we do, then it's just going to keep happening to future generations. And it's been really nice seeing people speak up about these things. And I'm learning that it's not something to be ashamed of, and it's something to really empower other women, and non-binary folks and just youth in general to not hide from talking about things like sexual assault, or mental health, or anything that would make you feel unsafe. And I'm learning that it's a really powerful thing to be an Asian woman that isn't ashamed of the social constructs and fetishization that are put upon us. That shame was never ours to hold.”*

Alexis explains how in order to heal and disrupt patterns of violence across generations, we need to be able to talk about their impacts, roots, and healing ways forward. She continues to talk about the power of storytelling during her Outro Interview, where she reflected on the places that she pinpointed on our collective map during the Relationships to Land and Place group session.

She says,

*“My dad's mom, my Mama, who is Okinawan... and just the history of Japanese colonization and Okinawa, American colonization, and how it ties to why I'm fighting for what I'm doing--why I'm supporting Filipino youth and wanting to reconnect with my ancestry and my history. And yeah, also why I tell my stories about domestic and sexual violence and stuff that goes really deep. With my Mama, and just Asian woman in general... I mean, we're all connected... Koreans, Filipinas, Okinawans... going through sexual slavery as 'comfort women' or 'comfort girls' during World War Two. It's just so connected.”*

Again, Alexis names the importance of sharing her stories as her way of disrupting harm and cultivating a space where one can unpack these intergenerational traumas not only for her own healing, but also for her family, and for collective solidarity and liberation.

In a similar vein of acknowledging the disruptive power of storytelling, Diana, a Chinese 1.5-generation immigrant and writer shared in the Intro Survey,

*“On a smaller scale, in my writing, I think I'm often trying to capture the weight of history and pain that Asian women carry, one generation to the next. There is so much strength in that and so much left unsaid. It's hard to know the sources of that pain: western imperialism and other forms of occupation, traditions of patriarchy and misogyny, various ways identity is given up to marriage, migration, capitalism, children, caregiving...”*

Diana utilizes writing to disrupt the harm of the invisibilization or “sweeping under the rug” of Asian women’s pain and oppression that Alexis previous refers to.

Throughout Meilani, JM, Alexis, and Diana’s examples of ways they acknowledge and seek to disrupt harm across generations have been through making unveiling of what was

intentionality erased or hidden---from representation of body size and Asian queerness to the sharing of experiences of many Asian non-binary folks, AFAB, and women.

## 2B. Access to Mental Health Support

Part of disrupting trauma cycles and systems that breed violence, is to have spaces for active engagement in mental health. Mental health access in the US is often incredibly limited for Asian folks. It's traditionally framed from a Eurocentric perspective, financially inaccessible, and consequently can be (re)traumatizing for many Asian folks. Further, there is stigma associated with reaching out for support particularly for Asians in the US considering pre-colonization Asian cultures' value communal support, and model minority myth placed on us fortifies the assimilation practice of individualism. In this subtheme, the Collaborators share their values and hopes for access to mental health support for them, their communities, and future generations.

In their Introductory Survey, Ammara shares, *“i envision us building a world that centers caring relationships, where asian american folks can process and heal the wounds of imperialism, intergenerational trauma...where we can easily access our needs and have them met”* They describe how caring relationships have the power to heal. They go on to say, *“we didn't just inherit ancestral trauma, but we also inherited ancestral strength, wisdom, and so what does it mean to address the trauma, but also do so in a way where it's empowering, and we focus more so on the healing and our power?”* What Ammara and multiple other Collaborators discuss throughout the study is the need for healing and their desire for scaffolded opportunities to do so, such as with therapy access.

Alexis and Ameera talk about wishing they had access to mental health support earlier. Alexis states,

*“My parents didn't believe in mental health until my suicidal thoughts didn't stop. Their fear around mental illness stigma impacted me in the way that I didn't go to a therapist, even after leaving an abusive relationship in high school. I basically went through undergrad with C-PTSD without realizing it.”*

Similarly, Ameera, who shared her experiences with attempted suicide, names that *“mental health isn't a big thing in our culture. And so, I'm kind of the first person in my family to go to therapy and do all these things and be on medication for stuff.”* While it's clear that therapy was often a difficult topic to broach with parents, Alexis and Ameera shed light on therapy being lifesaving.

In our Outro Interview, Lizzy explains how being prompted to write a love letter to her body was difficult and reminded her that she wanted to pursue therapy. She said,

*“It was just like, oh, I need therapy [laughter]. Because I don't have a therapist right now. It's just a reminder: ‘Well I gotta get on that. Because it's this shouldn't be hard.’ Or ‘this shouldn't make me want to cry’. You know, ‘this should be easy’, or ‘this should be a celebration’, ‘this should be like, yes!’ And I think just the fact that it is hard is something that is tragic.”*

Lizzy suggests that therapy would support her in healing as she considers her relationship to her body. Tragically, the body is often a site of pain for folks living within the margins of systems oppression, and although the art activity was prompting appreciation and joy, it was difficult for many, including myself, to hold on to love while holding the trauma and pain that has been connected to our bodies.

While the Collaborators have and continue to experience the impacts of intergenerational trauma, they brought up the ways they acknowledge it, fight to disrupt it, and call out supports they need and want for themselves and their communities to heal, prevent, and minimize it. These aspects make up intergenerational care they practice.

### 3. *Cultivating Culture of Care*

The purpose of this line of research at large is to move towards liberation from all forms of oppression. White supremacy survives off of the death and erasure of Communities of Color, folks with disabilities, queer communities, etc. Therefore, it does not come at a surprise that the 12 collaborators consistently mentioned that their hopes for future generations are around choice, safety, and joy. In this section, I offer examples from what the Collaborators have shared regarding the culture they want the society to cultivate for themselves and communities. Additionally, this section seeks to center the strengths, hopes, and wisdom of the Collaborators. As Julie mentions in her Introductory Survey, *“commitment to social justice centers the visions of complex communities, rather than centering the pain of marginalized peoples....”* She cites Tuck (2009) as *“a framework that shifted my theory of change from one that calls out oppression to one that centers the strengths, hopes, and wisdom of marginalized communities.”* Although the pain of oppressed communities is critical in acknowledging, Julie explains that that is not our only experience and solely centering our pain further oppresses Communities of Color and other oppressed communities, as it positions us as one-dimensional.

#### 3A. Refusal and Exercising Choice and Agency

Having access to choice and refusal without coercion on an interpersonal to a structural level is often not available given the insidiousness of white supremacy and colonization. In this subtheme of choice and agency, the Collaborators reveal ways choice and agency is part of their visions for a liberatory future by sharing stories of the lack of access to choice they experienced and the strengths they used to create choice for themselves. In her Intro Interview, Alexis thought about what she wishes for the education of future generations. She said *“making sure that you... have a choice and ...what kind of things you want to learn. And you're not just forced*

*to do things you don't want to do all the time.*" Alexis describes the compulsory aspects of traditional schooling, and the lack of choice and agency young people have in school spaces.

Similarly, during the outro interviews, I re-asked the Collaborators a similar prompt. I invited them to reflect on the qualities of chosen spaces they have been/are a part of. After they responded, I followed up asking how then they might imagine what an ideal learning space for Asian youth and the next generation in general would look like. Diana, who is a part of community organizations like API Chaya and Massage Parlor Outreach Project, responded with similar thoughts saying they want, *"choice in terms of what we explored...and [that] they were all very personal to our own lives."* Here, Diana discusses her hopes for a choice in engaging in what is relevant to learners. Further, JM, who is a first-generation immigrant who has experienced schooling in Singapore, Italy, and the U.S., shared their response:

*"I think this the fact that we're telling young people that, you know, their autonomy, agency is valued. To not look at their questions or shame. And I think that's very much as someone who went through a really intense education system, you know, that was really judgy. I want to show that discipline doesn't have to be hierarchical and oppressive, like discipline, I value discipline, I value structure. And I don't think in our education systems, or in our cultures, there's been enough room, and space to talk about discipline, accountability, structure, as well as values associated with autonomy, agency, and flourishing. holding ourselves accountable to our dreams and doing things we might not always enjoy. That's part of been on pursuing a vision."*

Right off the bat, they name the importance of autonomy and agency for the next generation. JM suggests discipline, accountability, and structure do not need to be through a practice of shame and punishment, but instead through choice and growth. They offer nuance in explaining that part of choosing to be accountable to the futures we want sometimes includes choosing to do things that may not be comfortable. In JM's hopes for the next generation includes access to choice and moving in ways we choose is a part of cultivating a learning space for liberation.

While choice and agency were frequently named aspects in thinking about cultivating

culture of a learning space, the topic of choice and agency also came up during the Relationships to Ancestors, the fourth group session. As a check in question, I asked the Collaborators what quality they were proud of having that was passed down from their ancestors. Angeli, a Desi parent, responded with “stubbornness”. Later, when sharing their reflection of the wedding jewelry they placed on the collective altar, they said,

*“when I was 22, I was graduating from undergrad, and my family had a party. And I had gotten wind that my grandma was gonna be like ‘Alright, now we got to talk about arranged marriage and getting married.’ I was just like, ‘Oh, shit.’ I was literally sitting in one chair. And then on the other side, it was all of my aunties and all the family that were like, ‘Yeah, we need to get on this immediately.’ And it was rough. And then at some point, the thing that I said was, ‘well Amma, we’re both stubborn, so we’re not really gonna get anywhere’. That didn’t land well at all...two or three years ago, I got married, and I wore her wedding jewelry. And it was super not traditional. It was like two hours. Usually, Indian weddings are like, a week long and I really thought about how this lineage of stubbornness was moving through me in that moment, and especially in wearing her wedding jewelry.”*

Although Angeli acknowledged the external pressure of their family, they also see the strength of their stubbornness and consequently the access to choice they created in their refusal to engage in an arranged marriage and decision to have an untraditionally short wedding ceremony. Through Angeli’s stubbornness, they were able to cultivate a space of choice.



*Figure 23 Angeli placing wedding jewelry on altar.*

The Collaborators explained the importance of choice and agency in their experiences with interpersonal relationships and with structures at large. They discussed the ways they didn’t always have access to choice and how they created opportunities for choice and agency. Without access to choice and agency, a culture of violence through shame, isolation, and coercion is created, as they described. Access to choice and agency also allows for a cultivation of safety, which is discussed in the next subtheme.

### 3B. Safety

As discussed in the second major theme, trauma and harm is normalized in a society that operates under systemic oppression. Consequently, cultivating a culture of safety is a common topic that arose from conversations of what the Collaborators wish they and future generations have access to. Safety as described here includes physical, psychological, and emotional well-being.

As Ammara mentions,

*“as a queer southeast asian woman/femme who is also a daughter of refugees and part of the diaspora, ive experienced various levels of harm and violence, seeing how layers of cisheteropatriarchy, white supremacy, imperialism, colonialism, and capitalism all interact to create unsafe conditions.”*

They make clear that their intersecting identities are targets of violent structures. Meilani similarly states, *“I’ve always thought about how marked by fear, all of our bodies are moving through public space.”* For most of the Collaborators, basic physical safety was a common hope they had for themselves and their communities. The study started around the anniversary of the 2021 Atlanta murders of Asian women. Less than a year later, the mass shootings at Half Moon Bay and Monterey Park in California included the murders of several Asian elders. Under the structures of white supremacy, we are seen as disposable, foreigners, and yellow peril, justifying the violence against us.

As the Collaborators describe, one of their hopes towards a liberatory future includes one where they are not moving in constant fear or hypervigilance to survive and therefore have access to exist fully without oppressive structures and violence. Alexis states, *“Asian women and non-binary folks would be able to walk anywhere, even in the dark, without fear of being targeted.”* She explains that she wants to live in a world that cultivates a culture of care where violence is not normalized to a point that people need to live in fear to protect themselves. Meryl

also shares, *“To me, social justice is (working toward the) freedom to bring our whole, authentic selves into every space we enter; it is the abolition of the violent systems/structures that minimize us.”* They are making the connection between everyday safety to the systems that normalized that violence. In the Intro Survey, Lizzy reflected on the tragic mass murder of Asian women in Atlanta in 2021. She said, *“On the anniversary of the Atlanta shootings, my heart is heavy. I am angry and sick of anti-Asian hate. I want a world where Asian American women/elders can simply feel at home and feel comfortable walking around in public.”* Lizzy emphasizes how her pursuit of justice included the basic need for the absence of harm. Similarly, Nica states,

*“Now that we are here, Asian communities (and lately, especially Asian non-men) are under intense attack from white supremacy and misogyny in the US. Ultimately, I see social justice for our communities to be the ability for all our communities and people to live and thrive outside of the systems that harm us.”*

They discuss how the US imperial violence Asian folks experience in our homelands does not end when we migrate to the US; instead, Nica wants safety from systemic oppression for people in and outside of their homelands.

In addition to needing safety from global impacts, Ameera discusses her experiences as trans, as Hindu, and as a woman regarding her need and desire for personal safety she is not afforded in a transmissic society. She mentioned that,

*“I'm not out to the community as trans so it's also very weird experience in that way, because I've been in a ton of conversations and spaces where people are openly transphobic. And they'll look at me and be like, ‘don't you agree? that's how it should be?’ And I'm like, ‘Yeah, you're totally right.’ But on the inside, I'm like, ‘if you guys knew that I was trans it would be a much different story.’”*

She goes on to explain that while she doesn't agree with these dehumanizing statements, she must prioritize her own safety in these situations. She went on to say, *“But I know that if I do that, I'm also endangering my own safety. And that's kind of why I'm not fully out.”* Ameera's statements echo the horrifying murder rates of trans folks, that are consistently normalized by the

government, media, and schools. She names the need and desire for personal safety from her experiences of not having access to it given white supremacy and transmisia. Further, Ameera discusses the need for communal safety as well. She shares,

*“I was going to a cultural event, and I was veiling. And, yeah, I got called a terrorist on the sidewalk...and he followed me to that event. And I was decked out with cultural clothing. No one did anything. No one helps.”*

Ameera describes the lack of safety she has experienced, alluding to the communal care she wished she had at the time. While she names that there was a clear perpetrator of harm, she also expresses disappointment when pointing out that bystanders allowed for the harm to happen and continue with their inaction to disrupt the violence.

Across the examples offered so far, the Collaborators have named that one of the most pertinent aspects of the justice they seek is basic human safety. In the Introductory Survey, I explicitly asked the Collaborators what justice for Asian non-binary folks and women might look like. Ammara shares, that it’s one *“where asian women, femmes and nonbinary folks are supported, cherished, safe, seen, and heard.”* Along a similar note, Alexis shares her desire for a world where, *“Asian non-binary and trans folks would be able to love and experience joyful, long lives in whatever ways they feel safe and happy.”* Both Ammara and Alexis describe their hopes for a world that included and existed beyond basic safety---one that was allowed space for joy, which I discuss more in the next section. Thinking back to the second major theme of intergenerational care, it is not surprising that a frequently discussed about aspect of being in a space was that it included safety. Safety allows us ease from living in a constant state of hypervigilance. So far, I’ve discussed access to choice and safety as subthemes of cultivating a culture in which the Collaborators want to be a part of and leave behind as future ancestors. In

the next section, I share evidence of joy being sustainable to the individual and to their commitment to liberatory futures.

### 3C. Joy

The desire and hope for joy is the third subtheme of cultivating culture. As Black abolitionist scholar Love (2019) states when discussing the importance of Black joy, "Joy is crucial for social change...Finding joy in the midst of pain and trauma is the fight to be fully human....Joy makes the quest for justice sustainable" (pp. 199–120). Love describes joy as an act of resistance and refusal, in a society structured on exploitation and death. In this subtheme, we see examples of how joy is needed and desired to sustain and free ourselves from oppressive structures.

For example, in her Introductory Interview, Lizzy shares,

*"I think this work is so exhausting—this work, I mean fighting for equity, or, you know, in general. It's hard to feel like it's worth it unless it's joyful. Yeah. And having, for me anyway, just knowing people, even if I don't know them super, super deeply, but just having that network, I think is so strengthening and energizing."*

It is understandably tiring to constantly be fighting to survive under a system that continues to dehumanize and quite literally murder you and your communities, and as Lizzy suggests, having a network of care and relationships to your communities is critical to that joy.

In reflection of trauma and writing a love letter to her body, Nurhaliza, a survivor and an organizer with community organizations including Rainier Beach Action Coalition and Cham Refugee Community, says to herself,

*"You can have fun when you want to have fun just because all of these things have happened. You're still healing from them. That doesn't mean that you don't deserve to have peace and deserve to laugh and deserve to have fun and take a break."*

She discusses how important joy is not as something after healing, but alongside healing. I also noticed how Nurhaliza phrases this portion of her letter as a permission or an affirming

reminder. This is significant considering the ways capitalism, patriarchy, and colonization continue to push the narrative of not deserving joy or needing to earn joy, and the normalization of pain and trauma. Nurhaliza is actively pushing against these structures to allow herself joy. On a larger scale, Alexis echoes this concept and states that one the lessons she hopes to pass down to future generations is that “*joy could be a part of resistance*”. Referencing the importance of taking up space in spaces that perhaps weren’t built for you, she continues to say,

*“The lessons that I would want to pass down, especially for Filipinx/a/o, would be to take up space with your loud ass laughter. Keep doing it, you will find people that love it, and love you for who you are. Even if you talk loud, and you giggle all the time and people don’t always understand you. And remembering that some people are committed to misunderstanding you. Showing up as you are is worth it.”*

Alexis alludes to how we don’t have to wait for joy but instead we can create it wherever we are.

Cultivating a culture of choice, safety, and joy were popular aspects that emerged from discussions with the Collaborators. These qualities stemmed from reflections of what the Collaborators wish they had access to growing up and currently. Further, these were qualities they described wanting future generations to have access to.

From the analysis of Introductory Survey, Introductory Interview, group sessions discussion, Outro Interview, and artwork created, three major themes emerged addressing the experiences, values, and hopes of the Collaborators that can inform what a culturally sustaining learning space might look like for Asian American young learners. These three themes include 1) operating from a liberatory lens, 2) attending to intergenerational care, and 3) cultivating a culture of choice, safety, and joy. As I discuss in the Discussions chapter, the values and hopes of the Collaborators described in these three themes are aspects that educators of color should consider when creating and enacting a culturally sustaining learning space.

## Discussion

At large, the purpose of this study was to move towards liberatory futures that sustain joy, well-being, safety, and hope. More specifically, this study aimed to do so through centering the experiences, narratives, values and hopes of 12 Asian non-binary and women organizers, community educators, healers, and artists. I asked two guiding questions:

- 1) How can we cultivate chosen, culturally sustaining learning spaces that are grounded in the values and hopes of Asian organizers, community educators, artists, and healers?
- 2) How might this inform the design of transformational and liberatory learning spaces across settings for Asian youth?

What I've learned from surveys, interviews, focus groups, and art-based document analysis with the 12 Collaborators is that many 1) saw their politics and activism as personal, 2) brought up caring for past, present, and future generations across various identities, and 3) desired access to refusal and choice, safety and joy, as critical pieces to cultivating a culture of care. In this chapter, I offer an analysis of key findings and implications of this work for practice future research, including how these three themes can help us dream up what liberatory and culturally sustaining learning spaces could look like for Asian youth in K-12 schools and community learning spaces.

### *Embodying Liberatory Politics*

In this section, I utilize the AsianCrit tenet: Story, theory, and praxis (Museus & Iftikar, 2013) to offer an analysis of the first findings: the personal is political. The Collaborators were asked to share about their stories/experiences throughout the study. For many Collaborators, their stories of living in a capitalistic, ableist, colonial, imperial, and white supremacist society as queer, disabled, trans, Asian non-binary folks and women, clarified for them what they need and

wanted for themselves and others, which was liberation from all structures of oppression. Their theories of liberation were inherently action-based, so they continue to see their own responsibilities in contributing to the futures they hope for. These commitments informed by their theories of liberation has led them to their community-centered roles today as organizers, community educators, artists, and healers who embody anti-imperialist, abolitionist, and anti-colonial politics and consequently create sustaining learning spaces for Asian youth.

The Collaborators' story, theory, praxis shows us the power of each person's lived experiences, the opportunities to facilitate theory building from our stories, and the capacity for young learners to be movement builders in everything they do. The Collaborators teach us as scholars, researchers, and educators that we must:

- 1) Recognize that everything we do is political and therefore needs to be regularly reflected on.

The words we use, the clothes we wear, and where we spend our time and money on a Tuesday is political. While these may not always be intentional choices, they are reflective of our values and theories. How then can we be more intentional about how we engage in our praxis? What opportunities can we build to reflect on the ways our choices and actions do not align with liberatory politics? As Paris (2021) names, we must create opportunities to engage in our own self reflexivity to interrupt internalized systems of oppression and strive towards liberatory futures.

- 2) Further, Paris also explains that within culturally sustaining learning spaces we can scaffold these opportunities for young learners to recognize this as well. If we know that the personal is political, then we can tap into young learners' lived experience to facilitate learning towards liberation. How can we demystify terms like abolition and anti-imperialism and recognize that these are politics of care, healing, and hope?

3) We also need to allow our pedagogy and curriculum to be guided by the politics of folks positioned within the intersections of oppressive structures. This is for a couple of reasons. First, the youth that we teach will also be positioned at various intersections of interlocking systems of oppression. Consequently, curriculum must be sustaining and accessible to all youth. Secondly, while this study is centered on Asian narratives, it's critical to note that like many of the Collaborators have stated, our liberations are tied. Therefore, even in a learning space with no Asian, queer, neurodivergent, trans, and/or disabled youth, the liberatory politics of the Collaborators will still be culturally sustaining because it is inherently intersectional and calls for intergenerational, cross racial, transnational, cross-identity solidarity. As explained by Paris (2021), culturally sustaining learning spaces include communal collaboration and engagement. How then do we invite and involve family members, community organizers, and youth as teachers, guides, and leaders in our workshops and classes? As mentioned during the Methods chapter, most of the Collaborators shared identities that they held that were not required to be a part of this study. They named that they are also queer, trans, neurodivergent, and/or living with disabilities. It was made clear in the Findings that their stories and experiences with colonization of home countries, gender-based violence, ableist schooling experiences, street harassment, etc. clarified what values, theories, or politics they needed to survive and thrive. Further, by being guided by liberatory politics of movement makers, we need to make intentionally steps to learn about and be perceptive to the access needs of Asian youth across abilities. This may look like the UDL practice of flexibility in use and allowing for refusal and excising of choice for Asian youth in the ways they engage or opt out of certain activities or discussions.

4) As mentioned in the Findings, many Collaborators saw the phrase social justice as is too vague to describe their politics. We are advocating for educators who want to move towards a future where we are all free from oppressive systems to hold liberatory, anti-imperialist and abolitionist lens. Further, these politics are not just lenses you can take on and off when you enter movement spaces, but rather, these are embodied politics. This means “being about it” and taking actions towards these futures in our fractal moments (brown, 2017). This includes valuing the abolition of policing, not just the institution of policing that was born out of maintaining enslavement, but also policing practices that show up, for example, in racist, sexist, and classist dress codes at schools. This also means returning land to Indigenous communities globally. This means divesting from the military and extensions of colonization. As educators, we can engage in the 12 movement makers’ commitment to taking responsibility to disrupt harm and cultivate a culture of safety. Not only can we provide a learning space where Asian youth feel safe by our embodiment of liberation, but also consider the workshops, zines, and lesson plans that we can create across fields to reveal the ways interlock systems of power are embedded in society. For example, how can we learn about the history of ICE and connect that to exclusionary immigration policies. How can we learn about geography through mapping out US military bases in our home countries or sites of resistance where our home countries fought against efforts of colonization?

5. Lastly, informed by the relational care and healing that the Collaborators engage in, educators and scholars can consider how they model disrupting counterproductive, oppressive, and harmful “devil’s advocate” narratives within themselves and other learners as an effort towards addressing harm. We can also think about how we approach healing discussion prompts when we host and hold space for grieving past and on-going trauma through UDL’s guidelines of

engaging in multiple means of expression. It's important that we provide space for and opportunity for learning how we can approach healing whether that is learning from our ancestors, confronting the harms Asian youth experience in schools, or through providing sustaining learning spaces that allow for such discussion.

The Collaborators make clear that they embody their liberatory politics. I argue that this is a powerful practice for educators as well that requires self-reflexivity, an engagement of youth's own story, theory, and praxis, and guidance from liberatory, anti-imperialist, and abolitionist lens.

### *Building Constellations of Care*

I also pull from a key aspect of CSP: practicing community accountability to make meaning across the three major findings. To reiterate what has been mentioned in the Literature Review chapter, Paris (2021) emphasizes that culturally sustaining learning spaces are accountable to communities, meaning that we collaborate with youth and elders, folks with intersecting identities. This section asks educators to reflect on who are you accountable to? For the Collaborators, this also included blood, chosen, political, more-than-human ancestors, Black, Indigenous, Latine, Pacific Islander, and Asian communities globally, and queer, trans, neurodivergent, disabled, and survivors of genocide and gender-based violence. What was apparent across the three themes was that relationality was critical to how the Collaborators built their praxis. From carrying on the legacies of their ancestors, recognizing their collective responsibility in disrupting harm and building liberatory futures, to working in solidarity with communities other than their own, building relationships out of care and love for communities and possible futures is essential in cultivating a culturally sustaining learning space and community. How then as educators are we building our constellations of care? What roles do we play in this constellation of care? At the beginning of the pandemic, Iyer (2020) offered up a

framework of one potential way we can consider building a constellation of care. In it, she lists roles such as storytellers, healers, disrupters, and caregivers. Together, these networks of folks are playing on their strengths and contributing to the wellness of the whole. On an interpersonal level and a structural level, we must create these constellations for ourselves and young learners. Like our embodied politics, our constellations, while they will shift and evolve over time, yet they are not something we can check by the door when we enter a certain space---we carry our constellations with us as they ground us in why we do this work and who we are held accountable to.

We can learn from the Collaborators constellation of care building with the following recommendations:

- 1) Recognize and honor that moves towards liberation have always been through collective work. Working in siloes or independently is a disservice to ourselves and the youth we teach. Today we are seeing rates of teacher burnout due to the lack of structural support provided to educators and the expectation to occupy the roles of educator, therapist, financial supporter, etc. that teachers often are forced to take on alone. We must utilize our constellations of care and refuse capitalistic pressures to work in siloes.
- 2) On a similar note, collaborate with organizers, elders, families, artists, healers, etc. to build your constellation of care of yourself and to construct your pedagogy and curriculum. Take note from examples like the Black Panther's Oakland Community Schools, where children were involved in learning in community spaces that they were already part of.
- 3) Honor your limited capacity and lean on your constellation. Many of the Collaborators called for structured mental health support and access. This is not to say that educators need to take on this role of a therapist, but rather how can we build relationships with local providers of mental

health services, and how can we lean on our constellations to collectively advocate for accessible and structured mental health resources in our learning spaces.

4) Access the support of your blood, chosen, political, and more-than-human ancestors. How can we look towards our histories to inform how we move in this world today as educators?

Throughout the Findings, the Collaborators mentioned tensions and appreciations for their ancestors that inform what legacies they want to continue and which ones they wanted to disrupt. How can we do the same? How can we lean on the story, theories, and praxis of our blood ancestors? How can we sustain the hope of political Asian ancestors like Lala Lajpat Rai, Grace Lee Boggs, Larry Itliong, etc. What lessons can be learned about restorative and transformative justice from healing plants like galangal, lemongrass, and turmeric?

5) Engage young learners in building their own constellations or care within the shared learning space. What roles and strengths do they resonant most with in Iyer's (2020) diagram or their own roles they identify? What roles and strengths do they notice about their peers in the shared learning space? How do we model asking for support and naming our needs? How do we model being receptive to others communicating that they need support? Here, we are tapping into young Asian learners' stories, theories, and praxis as strengths and necessary for liberatory world building. Further, we are learning from the Collaborators' commitment to co-creating a culture of care. We are then model on a smaller scale (the learning space) the constellations we want to create on a global scale for liberatory futures. Further, we are modeling the necessity of solidarity for our linked futures. Building constellations of care for yourself and young Asian learners allows for the centering of relationships and community accountability, which cultivates a culture of safety and joy. It also offers young Asian learners an opportunity to not only

recognize who has their backs, but also who they want to be accountable to in an intimate learning community and in a global community.

### **Conclusion**

Although violence against Asian communities and youth have existed across time and setting in the U.S., Asian led movement spaces have believed in the strength of community, committed to the disruption of white supremacy and colonization, and passed down critical knowledges to the next generation of Asian youth. While there are multiple studies that identifying the harms that exist against Asian youth in school spaces and society at large, limited empirical research exists that follow the ways Asian movement spaces are culturally sustaining Asian youth. Further, I was unable to find any studies focused on the Asian organizers, community educators, healers, and artists in an Asian led movement space. Guided by Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Asian Critical Race Theory, and Universal Design for Learning, I sought to learn about the experiences, values, and hopes of Asian movement makers in Seattle and surrounding cities, an area that has a significant Asian American community and has a legacy of Asian American activism. Learning about their experiences, values, and hopes can provide pedagogical and curricular implications for a liberatory education for Asian youth across learning settings.

With 12 local Asian organizers, community educators, artists, and healers, I engaged in qualitative narrative inquiry via surveys, interviews, focus group sessions, and art-based reflections to learn about their experiences, values, and hopes. With thematic memoing analysis, I identified three major themes: 1) the Collaborators personal experiences informed their politics and praxis, 2) they engaged in and desired intergenerational care, and 3) they want to cultivate a culture of care.

From these three major learnings, two implications emerge: Therefore, to create a culturally sustaining learning space for Asian youth across learning settings, we as educators, scholars, and organizers must 1) embody liberatory politics bridging our stories, theories, and praxis, and 2) build and lean on our constellations of care as this work requires solidarity and community effort.

### *Future Research*

While I intended to learn about the movement makers' roles and pedagogical practices in their respective movement spaces with youth at the start of the research study, the design shifted to focus on their relationships as a way to understand their values and hopes. This shift occurred as an effort to be responsive to their responses in their Introductory Survey and Introductory Interview, where the importance of relationships became a common topic that the movement makers brought up. During the Outro Interview, I asked the movement makers what loving critiques they had about our time together, and what were some areas they wished we could have addressed. Many of them named wanting longer sessions/ more time together in general, and opportunities to learn about what one another does in their respective communities and movement spaces. Therefore, future research should center movement makers' roles and pedagogical practices to further identify how the values and hopes of movement makers are carried out in their praxis. Their praxis may act as a model for teaching and learning practices in carrying out liberatory education. Researchers can engage movement makers through observations of their preparation work, their engagement with Asian youth, and reflection interviews after their workshops, protests, work session, etc. with Asian youth.

To further build off this study, it would be important to engage in similar methods from this study with Asian youth in these movement spaces. Considering that moves towards liberation is a practice of sustaining lifeways and generations to come, it is critical that we learn

with and from Asian youth, a critical aspect of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. As researchers and educators, we must consider the knowledges, lived experiences, values, theories, and hopes of Asian youth who we seek to sustain and whom we pass on our legacies to. Additionally, Asian youths' values and hopes need to inform the learning spaces that seek to sustain them and their futures. This work will continue to be for and towards a world where we can exist freely and build out our futures of care and joy with the seeds of liberation that we plant.

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**Appendix**  
*Introductory Survey*

1. By what name would you like to be referred to in this space?
2. If you are willing, please share your pronouns.
3. Email address (this will only be used by me to contact you)
4. This project centers folks who are 1) Asian/Asian American, 2) women or non-binary, 3) living in King County, 4) work with Asian communities (although not exclusively) within King County (and beyond--optional), 5) have a commitment to social justice, and 6) identify as a community educator (not exclusively at a school or college), organizer, artist, and/or healer, and 7) can attend at least 3 group sessions. Please confirm that you identify with all 7 descriptors listed.
5. In this project, I use the terms Asian and Asian American to denote folks of Asian descent that are currently residing in the US. Please share how you identify racially (ethnicity will be asked next) (e.g., Asian, Asian American, Asian and Black).
6. If you are willing, please share your ethnic identit(ies).
7. If you are willing, please share how you identify in regard to gender. Please note that this project excludes all men.
8. While the folks in this shared space may share a collective Asian woman or non-binary identity, we are complex individuals with varying other identities and experiences! Please share other identities or experiences that are important to you and that you'd like to share more about in this AsianCrit Community Project (e.g., SES, sexual identity, immigration generation, refugee generation, homeschooled, adoptee, region/state/city of upbringing, etc.).

9. How long have you lived in King County? Please visit this website to see the list of cities that are within King County.
10. Can you describe where in King County you currently reside? Please only use identifiers you're comfortable sharing publicly (e.g., city: Shoreline, section of a city: Northeast Seattle, or neighborhood: Beacon Hill). Please do NOT name addresses or street names.
11. Please describe your work with Asian communities in King County (and beyond-- optional). This might include organizations you're a part of, projects you've worked on, etc.
12. Please describe what social justice means to you. How would you describe your commitment to social justice? What would social justice look like for Asian/Asian American communities? For Asian women and non-binary folks? You are welcome to write freely (you're not required to answer all these questions or answer these questions in order).
13. Please describe yourself in regard to the work you do with Asian communities. You are welcome to check all that apply and add your own descriptors and specifications (e.g., Healer & Other: Acupuncturist; restorative justice dialogue facilitator; Artist & Other: Poet, muralist)
14. My hope is that you can attend at least 3 of the 5 group sessions. Please indicate any dates you CANNOT join in person at Kasama Space.
15. Because the end goal of this project will be a publicly accessible dissertation (e.g., written document, publications, and multiple presentations) and publicly accessible community zine, I'd like to ensure you receive credit for the amazing work you do. However, this means that your information (e.g., information from this survey, interview

responses, group discussion contributions, and artwork created) will be associated with your name (or pseudonym) and community work and therefore you will NOT be completely anonymous. Before any publicly accessible information is published or presented, you will have access to review, edit, delete, and/or add any aspects of your information.

16. We'll be sharing a meal together at each group meeting! Please share your favorite Asian-owned restaurants, cafes, caterers, and other food/beverage businesses in the city. While we won't be able to guarantee meals from all the named food spots, we can definitely try prioritizing some! Please list any dietary accommodations needed (e.g., peanut allergy, lactose-intolerant, vegan, kosher, halal, etc.).

## *Introductory Interview*

### **Intro**

- Would you start with telling me a little bit about yourself?

### **Educational experience**

- If you were to describe your schooling experience in 5 words, what would they be?
  - When you think back to your schooling experiences, what are some immediate thoughts or emotions that come up?
  - Can you share a few significant memories (maybe a specific moment, maybe just a general vibe) from your schooling experience?
- How would you describe yourself as a student?
  - What did it mean to you to be an Asian student?
- How would others (teachers, peers, family) describe you as a student?
- Can you tell me about a time you noticed your racial identity impacted your schooling experience?
- What about a time you noticed both your racial identity and gender identity impacted your schooling experience?
- This next question is adapted from Sebrena Burr, a mother and community leader in Seattle. She asks, “What if, in your education, you had an individual education plan that was designed for you and how you learned, that helped you to be who you were created to be, how would your life have been different?”
  - Reworded: What if, in your education, you had an individual education plan that was designed for you and how you learned, that helped you to be who you were

created to be, and compare that to your actual lived experience, what is similar, what is different?

- Outside of school spaces, what other learning spaces were you a part of? Did you have a community learning space like (org) you participated in? What was it like?
- What did learning with family look like? Specifically around racial, ethnic, and gender identity?
- Across these learning spaces you've described, what sustained you (if anything)? What were valuable experiences where you felt seen, understood, recognized, valued, appreciated, etc.?
- What are your hopes for schools?

#### **Personal experiences:**

- Can you reflect on relationships you have with other Asian women and nonbinary folks? In the context of learning happening everywhere, what would you say you've learned from Asian non-binary folks and women?
- How has your relationship to your Asian [insert gender identity] identity shifted over time?
- You mention being a trauma cycle breaker, neurodivergent, 2nd gen, living with disability. How have these identities impacted your experiences or influenced your social justice perspectives?

#### **Social justice values and aspirations**

- How have your social justice perspectives evolved over time? Some might call this a radicalization journey. Maybe this is one specific moment or experience, or maybe it was gradually over time.

- If your social justice perspective is a road, where are you going? What are you aspiring towards in regard to social justice? What are you still hoping to learn and how do you hope to grow?
- What brought you to the work you do now with Asian communities?
- As a community activist that racially identifies as Asian, how do you view your role and/or responsibility to Asian youth?
- What are the knowledges and skills around racial consciousness and resistance you hope to pass down to Asian youth in your program?

### *Outro Interview*

#### **Activities:**

- Go over activity list.
- What was your experience like completing each activity? (Go over, one by one)

#### **AsianCrit space:**

- How was your experience different or similar than what you were anticipating? Or what you wanted the space to be?
- What has this space meant to you?
- What would you have liked to be different?
- What are areas of growth of our shared space?
- At what point in your life did this project come to you? I.e., what did the timing of this project mean to you?
- Who did you know in the space before joining the AsianCrit project?
  - What was it like to meet/ share space with people who you didn't know but shared your identities/values?

#### **Learning spaces:**

Dr. Jazmen Moore uses the term “chosen space” to connote consent, voluntary learning spaces (as opposed to compulsory schooling, where students are legally obligated to go to).

- Why have you chosen the spaces you are a part of? (community orgs, friends, nature, etc.)
- In thinking about your chosen spaces, how can we imagine what an ideal learning space look like for Asian youth?