

Regenerative Dream Design: Improving Empathy Through Connection with Heritage Art

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I can speak the language of tigers, I can understand their words,

I can hear the honey bees, the bears, the lions, and the birds.

I can tell the mice what's on my mind, and I've heard. Yes, I've heard.

-Hollister Rhone (2022)

Parable

There once was a girl who was taken from her native land and forced to find belonging in the woods with a family that did not speak her native tongue. They did not eat the foods that she craved or know about the art that her hands twitched to create. She survived by making friends with the local animals, wild and tamed alike, who told her stories of the survival of others like her; Those whose souls had been removed from their bodies. The displaced. The missing.

As she aged, she became bitter about the loss of her culture. As her bitterness grew, she refused to listen to her animal family that tried to visit her. She turned them away at each of their visits, but she could still hear the rumblings of their calls. To escape their stories, she moved to the big city in hopes of drowning out the constant hum of the animals. There, despite all her efforts all she found was sickness and misery. She could still feel the rumblings of the animals calling her name, rising above the din of the city, feeling the echoes through her entire being.

Occasionally, the girl, would grow tired of hearing the rumblings along with the honks and yells from the city. To escape the disparate sounds fighting for her undivided attention, would escape to the woods. There, no matter how long she had been away, the animals would

come to her, encouraging her toward a greater path. For years, she turned them away only wishing for silence.

One day, while sitting on a city bench, a fox appeared by her side while a yellow finch landed on her shoulder. She tried shooing them away, but they resisted, staying strong in their need for her to hear them.

“The city is killing you. You are a girl made of dirt and water, trees and ferns. The land is calling for you. We are calling for you. Your healing will come. The time is now,” they sang.

After years of resistance and pain, the girl finally chose to hear the animals’ truth, the truth of healing and genuine belonging. She immediately moved from the city and made a home in the woods, rooting, growing, thriving. Because this is what healing looks like; the human body in partnership with the world that wants us to hear its cries.

What has the world been asking of you?

Diagnosis

Empathy

On a global and cosmic scale, empathy is lacking; empathy for other humans, the plant, and our animal brothers and sisters. Konrath (2017) found that empathy levels between 1979 and 2009 decreased by 48% in university students in the United States. In the largest study reported on empathy, Konrath, Chopik, and O’Brien (2011) found that cultures that are considered more collectivistic have, on average, higher empathy scores. Santos et al. (2017) found that individualism worldwide has increased approximately 12% since the 1960s. They also found that disaster frequency and changes in climate along with changes in socioeconomic development have direct impacts on rates of individualism.

I argue that this increase in individualism and lack of empathy is a direct cause of Combined Climate/Coronaviruses Disruptions (CCCDs) and once triggered, causes CCCDs to increase their detrimental effects on the human population which causes detrimental effects to the planet and other living beings. Empathy among humans is correlated to behaviors that benefit the world including pro-environmental attitudes and behavior (Ienna et al, 2022). By increasing empathy levels in humans, not only will there be less intolerance, but there will also be an increase in the desire for the active participation in improving environmental issues.

Heritage Art

Art therapy has been practiced in the Western world since the 1930s. There are theories that posit that using art as therapy triggers an evolutionary survival instinct (Kaimal, 2019). However, the field of art therapy has been based in Western art practices and is regularly critiqued for not incorporating art from around the world (Joseph, 2006; Talware, 2010; Moon, 2010). Because of these critiques, there recently has been a small movement towards cultural art therapy that can incorporate artistic practice from areas outside of the Western world.

The literature of those using heritage art for mental healing is sparse, however, the literature that does exist is compelling. This is particularly impactful for those whose culture doesn't consider art as an artistic endeavor but rather a daily practice (Cameron, 2010). This traditional wisdom and connection to artistic practice can help patients find spiritual meaning as well as create a feeling of interconnectedness with more than human species (Franklin, 2017; Nagarajan, 2018). Studies have shown that incorporating heritage arts has helped migrant women through adversity (James, 2019), Indigenous individuals feel cultural pride and sense of belonging (Campanelli, 1996; Basto et al., 2012), Canadian Inuit and Metis improve self-

development and feelings of safety (Archibald, et al., 2010), and can change the perception of pain and improve mood in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Australians with dementia (Lindeman et al., 2017; de Guzman et al., 2010; Muirhead & De Leeuw, 2013).

Although additional research needs to be done, it is clear from these studies, that a deep dive into the use of heritage arts in larger populations needs to be done in the future.

Dream (Wildest)

Lack of empathy is directly related to a clear sense of one's own identity as well as our desire to help others and the greater community (Krol & Bartz, 2022). I theorize that part of the issue with the ability to empathize is related to the lack of empathy that we hold for ourselves when we live in individualistic societies. This is not to be confused with lack of care for the self, but rather the practice of being kind and nurturing to the self even through struggles. Self-empathy is difficult in individualistic societies where the emphasis is placed on success over all else.

This lack of self-empathy is again tied to identity as my theory includes the idea that people do not have a clear sense of one's identity because there is some part of their identity that they do not engage with either by choice or by circumstance. This is ultimately tied to trauma that people have experienced in their lives. This trauma then changes the body's chemistry as scientists have learned that adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) create an imbalance in the gut microbiome. This can be passed down through generations as trauma experienced by a pregnant woman can change her gut microbiome and thus change the microbiome of the fetus as it develops (Hantsoo et al., 2019). These bacteria that are altered or killed off in the gut cannot be brought back through diet (Sonnenberg, 2016). The bacteria in

the gut controls signals that help the body produce serotonin. The death of bacteria in the microbiome creates inflammation in the body and prevents serotonin from being developed, leading to a lower sense of wellbeing (Yano, 2015). Rupa Marya and Raj Patel call for deep medicine as the only cure to these ailments (Marya & Patel, 2022). To practice deep medicine is to bring back ancestral healing processes which can heal our bodies of inflammation. This deep medicine can look like meditation or breathwork and re-establishing our relationships with each other, the land, and ourselves.

My dream is to help others embrace their whole selves, opening the pathways to deep healing, empathy for others, the desire to help, and connecting with the land. I plan to start this work with Korean and Hawaiian Americans in the Hawaiian Islands to encourage the healing of deep colonial trauma and increase the value of community to solve the issues facing the region. The dream is to provide deep healing to both adults and children through the introduction of healing via ancestral art engagement. This deep healing will be measured through participant storytelling and the measurement of the gut microbiome before, during, and after treatment.

Situatedness

In doing this work, it is imperative that I acknowledge my own background, biases, and ensure that I approach the work with cultural humility (Kaimal, 2019). For the population with whom I will be working, I am uniquely qualified to undertake this task as a Korean American, first-generation woman with multiple conflicting identities. My partner is Hawaiian American from a large Hawaiian family who has deep ties to the land and the community with which I will be living. I have an education, arts management, and nonprofit background and have been active in helping those who have not traditionally had a voice in society for over 20 years. My

conflicting identities makes it easy to work with others regardless of their background and experiences. To deliver art-based sessions with this population, I will use the network that I have to bring in culturally appropriate teachers based on the art being created.

Regenerative Design

Design Tools

I will use seven design tools to complete this design.

1. Gardening – Second Generation Seeds (<https://www.secondgenerationseeds.com/>) focuses on growing Asian heirloom seeds providing grower's guides and companion planting guides. Hawai'i Seed Growers Network (<https://www.hawaiiseedgrowersnetwork.com>) provides heirloom seeds for Hawaiian vegetables and resources to assist growers.
2. Artistic Practice – I will partner with the Honolulu Biennial that showcases contemporary art from Hawaii as well as the Bishop Museum and Honolulu Art Museum to ensure that the art that participants will be doing is culturally relevant. I will also partner with Dr. Maria Kim, who works in the therapeutic arts for Korean populations.
3. Food sheds – Rupa Marya and Raj Patel (2022) encourage working with traditional foodsheds as a way of healing the gut microbiome. I will partner with a university gut microbiome lab to help provide the testing analysis.
4. Fibershed – In both Korean and Hawaiian cultures, the traditional fiber is made of mulberry paper that is turned into clothing.
5. Storytelling – Storytelling is a common practice in Hawaii. I will work partner with a local storyteller to help provide best practices for Hawaiian participants. I will also partner

with Korean American Story (<https://koreanamericanstory.org>), an organization that films oral histories of Korean Americans to provide best practices for Korean participants.

6. Engagement in nature – Hawaiian culture heavily emphasizes the love of the land (Aloha 'Āina). As such, I will partner with Hawaiian elders and the University of Hawaii's Institute for Sustainability and Resilience (<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/isr/>) to determine the best opportunities for healing in and with nature.
7. Deep medicine – Both Hawaiian and Korean holistic practices include using the power of nature to provide healing. Much of this is done through the traditional use of plants.

More Than Human Species

As this design includes significant participation with nature, there will be interactions with more than human species. That being said, these will not be purposefully entered into this dream design. However, the more than human species will be a beneficiary as the participants will be more actively and positively engaged with the environment, the local ecology stands to be impacted positively.

Regenerative Design Indicators

The indicators that will show that this design is beneficial and not harmful are as follows:

1. Enhance health and wellbeing through a measured improvement in gut microbiome and psychological surveys.
2. Creation of art products using traditional techniques means utilizing supplies that are regenerative in nature.

3. Design teaches self-reliance on traditional techniques that are regenerative
4. Encourages biocultural diversities by increasing the prevalence of native non-invasive plants
5. Reduce CCDs through knowledge of traditional practice and decrease of impact of CCDs by increasing empathy for all living systems.
6. Design influences policy by showing categorical proof of the ability to heal with, in, and for nature leading to potential policy change after publication of findings.
7. The design sequesters excess carbon dioxide and Greenhouse Gas Emissions by encouraging the planting of indigenous plants (protecting terrestrial ecosystems) and growing nutritional vegetables at home leading to less driving for groceries in food deserts.
8. Through partnerships at various levels across and within the design, support will be built into the design engagement.

Smartness

This design has multiple levels of smartness.

1. Nature – learning what nature does and best practices for engagement
2. Edibility – eating what we grow in our backyards
3. Learning – exploring individual's and community heritage while learning that engagement in this design helps both the individual and the local and planetary environment
4. Aesthetics – creating art from nature
5. Biocultural – increasing knowledge of the local ecosystem

The 5 E's

This design actively engages the felt experiences of the 5 E's. By learning about ancestral practices and finding the nature activities that they enjoy, the head (Engagement) will be experienced. The hands (Enactment) will be engaged through the learning of how to create using these ancestral practices. Participants will display their heart (Enablement) by learning and engaging in active storytelling to describe the experiences that they have. Through introduction to a multitude of ancestral practices, the gut (Embodiment) will be able to determine which practices make sense to continue. Taking away these skills will allow for ownership (Empowerment) of the ancestral practices and allow for participants to teach these practices to their family and communities.

Delivery

Beneficiaries

In this iteration of the design, Native Hawaiians, Korean Americans, Hawaiian plant systems, and Hawaiian native animals are the beneficiaries. In the future, testing should be done in other geographic areas and biospheres to determine replicability.

As outlined in “Design Tools,” these beneficiaries will be actively involved in the preparation, implementation, and conclusion of all activities to ensure that the design remains bias free and appropriate.

Phases

Phase 1. Draft initial design.

Phase 2. Autoethnographic design to determine impact.

Phase 3. Hone design – Make updates based on feedback from autoethnographic design. Meet with potential partners to discuss best ways to move forward.

Phase 4. Set up for success – Formalize partnerships. Secure funding. Determine rollout plan.

Phase 5. Launch small group testing

Phase 6. Analysis – Determine results, successes and opportunities for improvement

Phase 7. Hone design – Make updates based on feedback from small group testing. Meet with partners to discuss further partnership. Secure funding for larger test group.

Phase 8. Launch large group design

Phase 9. Analysis – Determine results and continuously improve

Spheres

This dream design actively contributes to the learningsphere and the leadership sphere.

During the testing of this design, participants are encouraged to learn about themselves and their identities through the engagement with ancestral knowledge. The variation of learning creates a pluriversity. This will ignite a desire to learn more over time. After testing, the participants will move into the leadershipsphere where they will take the knowledge that they received and pass it along to others and advocate for further learning.

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