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**2015-16 RA/CE YEAR 4 PROJECT PAPER – SHERRY SAKAMOTO
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THE POCAYAW* EXPERIENCE

I was involved with two projects. One was working with People of Colour (Asians) and the other with Young Adults.

In my first year at Radical Aliveness, I was sitting at a table in the dining hall. A 4th year student, Niki Angel came to sit with me while most of the other students were leaving for the community meeting. Niki asked me how I was doing. I scanned the room and said, “Look at this place. Look at the mess on these tables.” A huge smile lit up her face as she nodded her head up and down, and said she too was not sure why some students didn’t clean up after themselves as staff requested and that it bothered her too. There was always something at these training modules that didn’t make sense to me. I would try to bend myself into some place to “fit in, to show up, speak my mind and not hold back.” As much as I loved the connections with the community, I felt a disconnection sitting in the background. As my first year of training was coming to an end, I happened to log-in to the RA/CE NING student website where I discovered some of the write-ups of the Year 4 student projects. I read Niki’s project paper that shared her perspective on the importance of being aware and sensitive to the differing ways of being that affect how cultural groups interact in the wider world. Her specific topic of collectivism vs individualism was the hammer than hit the nail on the head for me.

Collectivism is when each person in the group is encouraged to be a team player, to do what is best for the community or family, promote unity, work collaboratively and cooperatively where everyone supports each other along with an intention to live in harmony. Individualism focuses on initiative, independence, to “do your own thing” and to rely on one’s self toward achieving your personal goals.

My parents were born in Japan and I was born in Canada so I grew up as the “in-between two cultures” generation of my family-of-origin. It was a struggle to straddle my collectivist Japanese heritage and the dominant individualist “white” culture that my parents wanted me to immerse myself into. My parents had been interned during World War II; decreed enemy aliens by the Canadian government after Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour in Hawaii. They were ordered to take only what could fit in a suitcase and herded to horse stalls at a local agricultural fair grounds where they were

sent by train to locations across Canada. Some people were behind barbed wire, others were sent to sugar beet farms to work as cheap labour.

It was my Japanese culture's collectivism that helped them to survive. Their community worked together and supported each other through these difficult times. The effects of the internment on my parents were devastating, but perseverance and hard work helped them to overcome their economic disadvantages. Because of the shame and embarrassment of internment, the community worked to prove their worth by being ambitious and assimilating into western culture. My parents encouraged their children to not make waves, be nice, prove we deserved to belong and not to offend or make people angry at us for fear this experience of exclusion could happen again. Their strong message to their offspring was to get out there, conquer the world and make them proud but also to stay true to our Japanese heritage so we could stay close by to help our parents navigate the white world.

The emotional toll of the internment experience on families went underground, only to rear its ugly head in later years. In the confusion and stress of re-establishing their roots, they reacted and punished in ways that destabilized and traumatized their children. For children of immigrants, a common dilemma is of trying to fit in to two differing cultures; navigating the world alone and also being a parent to their parents. I carried a personal shame of my culture, wanting to be free of it and to be "white." I internalized the unspoken fear, sadness and shame of my people. This internalized oppression kept me from really claiming my Asian culture. I survived by immersing my need for emotional connection into the imaginary world of American television families like those in the Donna Reed Show, Ozzie & Harriet and Father Knows Best. I was struggling with feelings and the Asian cultures I knew didn't share inner emotions. I could not pretend that nothing had happened to me and hit a wall with my Japanese-Canadian community that took on the attitude that what happened, happened and there was nothing we could do about it...just move forward. I buried my feelings and suffered alone. As complexity and issues of diversity arose within the RA/CE community, it got me thinking about my relationship to my Japanese collectivist heritage and my confusions about it and these feelings began to take centre stage for me as I navigated the Radical Aliveness world.

When I was trying to decide what to work on as a project, this topic was the one that would repeatedly pop into my head...working with Asians. It was something I didn't want to listen to. I get triggered by Asian people. I hate the Japanese customs of bowing and no touching. I decided it was more than I was prepared to risk.

I decided to work with Young Adults ages 18-35 and during the third training module of Year 3, I reported to my classmates of my intention to do so. I delayed thinking about how or when I was going to do my project. My main fears were what if people don't show up, don't get the work? What if I get a brain fart and don't know what to do next? What if, what if, what if?

In March 2015, it was a beautiful sunny day. I rode my bicycle through an intersection when a car turned left and hit the back tire of my bike, sending me flying into the front grate of a huge pickup truck waiting for the light to change. I bounced off the truck and landed hard on my left thigh. After an ambulance ride and check-up at the hospital, I came away with a huge wine-coloured bruise on the back of my thigh. I could not move comfortably and my injured leg muscle contracted, leaving my left leg shorter and my toe pointing into the floor. I plunked myself on the sofa, started a marathon of Netflix and hobbled around for nearly a month. At some level, I was quite relieved I didn't have to think about my project.

Several weeks on my road to recovery, I got an email from a friend that I had met through a school that both of our kids had attended (my classmate, Ellen's school). Mika was studying Family Constellations Therapy and was inviting me to a workshop for Asians. I like Mika and wanted to support her, so I said Yes, I would come. Then, I began thinking that this might be a good place to meet other Asians and to see if I liked them. When I got to the workshop, I offered to give Mika "time." This is a Re-Evaluation Counselling technique equivalent to holding space for her to have all her feelings prior to leading her workshop. We later talked about what I was doing in my RA/CE training and she offered me her support in whatever way I needed. When the Asians returned after a break in her workshop, she invited me to tell the group about RA/CE and my need to do a project workshop. Several people immediately said they were interested. I took a breath and thought, "OK, this workshop I am avoiding, can really happen." I went home, wrote up a workshop description and sent it to Mika who shared it with her email list.

I was still feeling hesitant to do the workshop but figured this must be happening for a reason. I had always longed to be with Asians who could access their emotions and share vulnerability but I felt terrified of leading a workshop for Asians. Because Asian culture is collectivist where personal problems tend to be solved privately and "darker" emotions are not normally shared openly, this felt like a nail-biting challenge and a huge risk to me. I assumed it would be a hard group to satisfy. I had this idea that I had to be impressive or perfect to be acceptable around them. I was afraid of being with other rigids, showing vulnerability with them and began to

question myself about what I had done by saying Yes! I was truly surprised at the response to my workshop from Mika's email group with five people not able to make the date I had chosen, but another five Asian women of East Indian, Japanese and Chinese heritages accepted. My son's girlfriend's mother made it six participants. I was thrilled that one of the women was coming from Seattle, Washington!

I sent out interview questions that could be answered through email or by phone interview. My Seattle participant discovered her passport had expired, so had to withdraw from the workshop. "Darn! There goes my bragging rights that I had an out-of-country participant!" When I cleared the rest of them to attend the workshop, I emailed a welcome letter and a more detailed page of what to expect and how the day would likely unfold. Throughout the prep time, I was nervous about how I would lead, not wanting to make mistakes or look stupid. After a time of worrying about imaginary scenarios of what ifs, I decided to take a stance for myself not to go to the worse-case scenario, as was my tendency. I chose to go with the flow and be OK with whatever happened; that whatever happened was meant to happen. I asked the Universe to support me to be OK with what might come up, especially if I didn't know what to do.

On Saturday, May 13, 2015, the day of the workshop, I was well-prepared. I decided to do the 10am to 6pm workshop in my home and removed all personal belongings from the room. I made a sign for the front door of my house with contact info for any curious neighbours who might wonder what was going on if they heard loud noises or screams. My husband, Terry who is also in RA/CE training, assisted me. I created a template to follow for myself, of how the day could unfold, always being aware of the need to be flexible.

The five Asian women were at first shy during the opening movement of the workshop but opened up as they looked to me for direction. The more relaxed and fun energy I displayed, the more they responded to my enthusiasm. As I felt excited and encouraged them to let go, they became much more comfortable in the space and with each other. After movement and dancing to build the energy, I asked them to get a partner and talk about what they needed, to allow themselves to be fully here. Common concerns of needing safety, fear of being judged or looking stupid were voiced.

I shared some basic RA/CE theory using several posters I made showing how hurt and traumas impact us, how the wounding energy organizes in our bodies and how the techniques and exercises of Radical Aliveness Core Energetics could move blocked energy bringing more

balance and aliveness to our bodies and psyches. I was surprised by their deep level of curiosity and they asked many many questions which I was able to answer in ways that satisfied them. Their enjoyment of learning about RA/CE was very palpable and my way of explaining concepts in less technical terms seemed to resonate with the women.

I had asked Terry to assist me, thinking that he could stand in as “the white oppressor” if they needed it, but what came out as the dominant topic to work on for them were issues with their fathers or male bosses. Terry filled that role brilliantly. They punched, yelled their disgust and shed tears of their frustrations. Some participants were very surprised at the intensity of the energies that rose out of them.

Collectivism was always present in the room. From people helping each other to be comfortable by adjusting pillows, to sharing extra foods they had brought for lunch, to helping clean up dishes; it was a delightful experience for me. I felt like I had come home! I didn’t have to say anything as the collectivism in each participant worked seamlessly to be in service to each other. Even more satisfying was their willingness to feel. It blew my mind that these Asian women were emoting, sharing tears and anger and actually loving it!

Patty Haman has spoken about a place in the facilitator when working with groups where it feels like you tap into a channel of wisdom and ease. That’s what happened for me working with and supporting these Asian women. I felt totally in my element leading and holding space for them. At the end of the workshop, the participants said they wanted more workshops like this, appreciated the safe container that was created and felt the love that Terry and I had for the group.

With the success and confidence from leading my first People of Colour Workshop, I decided to offer another one three weeks later, on June 13th. I discovered that the month of June was not a good month as many people were busy with their children’s school events, sports team windup parties or preparing for summer holidays. Two participants were all who registered. As I considered rescheduling this June workshop for September, I realized that I had totally forgotten about the project that I had publicly committed to.

The idea of creating a Young Adults workshop was birthed when I was riding on my city’s subway line and noticed that every person except me had their face planted into their cell phones. There was nobody talking to each other, nobody looking at anyone, no laughs, no smiles. I felt really sad and thought, “what will be the long-term outcome of living like this? This is not good!” I noticed how young people crossing street intersections

staring at their electronic devices with hardly a look up would anger me. I would imagine myself screaming at them, "Somebody out there loves you and would miss you, if you get yourself killed, so pay attention!" I was frustrated with how young people seemed to be oblivious to much of the world around them and thought there has to be some fallout from living with reduced connection. My oldest son, Fraser would often express how hard it was to find people who were willing to engage at a more vulnerable level. I connected with him on that point and wanted to see if there might be some young people who were aware that they were missing deeper connection with others.

I am a big fan of teenagers and young people. They don't scare me like some adults have expressed to me. I wanted to see what it would look like to work with young adults, see what kind of impact Radical Aliveness would have on them and to bring them some opportunities to connect with other young adults with more honesty and authenticity.

My sons have a large network of friends and many of these young people are also my Facebook friends; people I have met and gotten to know through my sons' sports teams. I checked with my sons to see if they had any friends whom they thought might be open to doing this kind of feeling work. I designed a flyer and posted it to Facebook and personally invited some of the people my sons had identified for me. I received six replies, but no firm commitments. I asked Terry if he could assist but he was unable to commit that date so I gulped and carried on. I really wanted him there to be able to lead a mini drum circle after lunch to help build the energy back up.

Terry and I were still in Los Angeles re-integrating from our first Year 4 RA/CE training module, five days before the October 25th Young Adult workshop date. We received an email from Terry's sister saying Terry's younger brother, who has cancer, had a severe blood infection and it was not looking good. The day after, we arrived home late in the evening. Before the training module, we had arranged to take Terry's stepmother, a day after coming home, to the cemetery for the 2nd anniversary of Terry's dad's death. So much to do and think about before the Saturday workshop! Will I need to cancel? Will I be able to concentrate? I had been struggling with a sinus infection during the whole training module and thereafter, during re-integration at my classmate, Leslea's house. I decided to go ahead with the Saturday Young Adult workshop since I couldn't go visit my brother-in-law in the hospital with still some remnants of a cold. I also came home to my youngest son who was in a bad mood, feeling depressed from being without his girlfriend who was in Spain for a year teaching English

and angry at us for not giving him enough time to vent his feelings. We had a blow-out! I felt angry, tired and pulled in many directions by outside forces. I still had paperwork to send out for the workshop and I needed to re-affirm people were still coming, after saying they would see if they could make it. The young adults were reluctant to commit until the 11th hour!

On the day of the workshop, one participant could not make it. I had four women and one man. They were noticeably more nervous than the Asian group participants; less chatty, less at ease. I got the movement music going and they danced but not as freely as I had anticipated. I pretty much followed the template from my People of Colour workshop. I got them to partner up and asked the same question about what they needed to be fully present, then did intros and had them share their answer to the question. I invited them to set an intention. Lighting their own candle, they shared beautiful and thoughtful intentions.

When we walked around the room and I encouraged them to express sounds and words, I could feel them holding back. They seemed much more self-conscious and reluctant to reveal themselves than I thought young people would be. They appeared to be looking at each other, seeing what the other person was doing and trying not to be too obvious about showing what was going on for them. I could feel myself getting scared, wondering if they would be able to relax and get something out of this day. I was beginning to regret putting on this workshop!

I shared RA/CE theory. They asked few questions and seemed interested with some more familiar structure. I decided to let them have an experience of hitting the cube to build their energy and to, hopefully, open to any feelings that might come up. Using two cubes simultaneously to let the group hit in pairs so as not to feel like the centre-of-attention, I encouraged them to follow their own impulses and to move in and out of using the cube as they felt called. After a few people repeated their turn, one participant felt anger coming up about her partner. I asked the male participant if he would be willing to be a stand-in as her partner, which he did. She leaned her pelvis against the cube, yelled out strong words and pushed the man, telling her partner to show up more. When she felt complete, I could see the man was visibly happy that he had played an important role to her process. She expressed how good it felt to get this out of her body and also uncovered some sadness. The hitting brought forth energy, sadness, feelings of depression in others and many shared how much they could feel in their bodies despite a level of rigidity in their hitting style. I felt much better when they began to express how connected they felt to each other by seeing the vulnerabilities of others. They shared

their reflections to the person doing the process and how their own experiences brought resonance and deeper connection with others.

We broke for lunch a half hour sooner since there was not enough time to work a bigger process. During lunch, we discovered that the male participant was a musician. I later asked him if he would be willing to lead some drumming when we return from lunch which he was happy to do. The Universe had answered my wish to do drumming!

When we started the drumming, I encouraged the group to make noise but they were reluctant to, so I walked around the circle with a shaker, made some sounds and repeated them myself for 8 bars. Then I told everyone to take a turn making a sound and we would repeat it for 8 bars. By the end of the sound reps and drumming, they were really feeling energized. I thought someone would be ready to process a problem or issue, but nobody was willing to step into doing one, so I had to quickly brainstorm with myself and decided to take a risk. I told them that I would like each person to stand with me and answer this question, "What don't you want people to know about you?" I had no idea how this question would be received but felt compelled to ask it and silently hoped this would not be in vain. Each person bravely stood for 10-15 minutes sharing very deep truths...that they drank too much, they were feeling lost, were disappointed, felt like a fake. Each person's truths brought deeper truths for those following. Participants felt excited and relieved to hear about others' secrets and hidden feelings. Occasionally, listeners would pipe in that they too felt that way. I could see and feel the room uniting energetically. Sentences like "I love this! You are so brave! I have that too!" would be shouted by the listeners.

The time flew by and I wanted to have time to talk about how to integrate back into the wide world after feeling deep connection and opening during a workshop. I also wanted them to have the opportunity to share essences of each other...appreciations and truths that they experienced of one other. The person to the left of the featured person would write the list of words shouted out by the others. I also did this exercise with the People of Colour group. It was really fun to witness! The young adults initially felt very uncomfortable hearing essences expressed about them. They stood and squirmed but slowly allowed themselves to hear and take in the words and by the end of their turn, felt profoundly touched. Happiness spread across their faces! They shared that they had never experienced a workshop like this before and that they loved the group work. They were excited to have others to resonate with and said that I had allowed that to happen without wanting to control it or change

what was happening. They also felt very safe and appreciated the way I invited and encouraged them to share and participate and took in what they said without judgment. Participants seemed happy, connected with each other and deeply appreciative of what they had experienced. I felt both relieved I had survived leading this workshop solo and a sense of deep satisfaction of the way I was able to bring and share my leadership.

I sent out a survey after the workshop and some comments that came back were...

"I appreciated the kindness and the openness of the participants which made me feel like I could actually open up myself, something which has been nearly impossible for me in my life."

"I learned that the only person I am hurting by pretending to have all the answers is myself and if I plan on moving forward at all in my life, I need to let people help me."

"It's a testament to your success with this workshop that all of us involved plan on continuing to work on ourselves together. Now that's pretty beautiful and amazing." (And yes, some of them have been meeting.)

WHAT DID I LEARN/RECEIVE FROM DOING THESE WORKSHOPS?

People of Colour Workshop:

...I felt overwhelmed by the paperwork...formulating the interview questions, doing interviews, sending out paperwork...things that needed consent or approval. I am used to doing official things on a handshake and organizing the paperwork felt harder than the idea of doing the workshop.

...I let my son's girlfriend's mother attend my People of Colour workshop. I had some information about her from past concerns that my son needed to vent and I was not sure how I would feel about this person, that I may have some bias toward her. I was able to hold the space for her as she felt safe and willing to open to her feelings. I felt my judgment of her melt into feelings of immense love and respect for her.

...I used the social media of Facebook to advertise my workshops and invited people directly who had expressed any interest in RA/CE. In future advertising, I would use the Meetup website that Jody and Terry have had success with in recruiting workshop participants.

Young Adults Workshop:

...That I have the ability and the know-how to improvise on-the-fly and that it seems to always be as successful as I am willing to let it happen, without needing to judge it or myself.

...When there is no strong energy to process by anybody, I can go with the flow and move into something else that can still help them to feel.

...The young adults were still pretty much in their heads and afraid to fully emote, but it felt important that they connect to each other on their own terms and just be with each other, share mutual feelings and perspectives and learn to trust each other. I didn't have to control it or need particular outcomes for it to feel successful to me.

...That I have the ability to hold space for people through all kinds of feelings and energies and that RA/CE does not need to be loud or boisterous to be working.

...That I provided way too many snacks. I somehow thought since they were younger, that they would have bigger appetities.

WHAT I LEARNED...IN GENERAL

...That I have gifts that I can bring to the world in my own way...that it doesn't have to look a certain way.

...That I love working with groups much more than doing one-to-one counselling.

...That what I may think looks like mistakes very often is exactly what is needed for the energetic shift to happen.

I am very happy how both of my workshops unfolded and how I was able to navigate the ups and downs of leadership, by both feeling the terror and the ease at intertwining moments. I noticed the immense energy that my body used to hold space for a day-long group workshop and felt very relieved, tired and exhilarated at the completion of my two workshops. Being with the Japanese, Chinese and East Indian cultural groups that practice collectivism helped me to claim the collectivist parts of myself and allowed me to be more confidently in my own cultural truths within the Radical Aliveness community. I came to an understanding that I don't need to give up what I love about my collectivist roots to fit in to the normative culture. Because of my experiences of both the collectivist and individualist worlds, I feel I can bring a particular perspective and awareness that can serve me well when working with the complexity and diversity in groups, particularly where I live in Vancouver, BC, Canada. I look forward to bringing Radical Aliveness Core Energetics to new groups with my practiced skills, a solid grounding and an open heart.

* POYAW (People of Colour & Young Adults Workshops)