



Body Mapping and Story Circles in Sexual Health Research with Youth of Color: Methodological Insights and Study Findings from Adolescent X, an Art-Based Research Project

December 2021

Adriana Brodyn, MAC, MA, Soo Young Lee, MA, Elizabeth Futrell, MSPH, Ireashia Bennett, BA, Alida Bouris, PhD, MSW, Patrick Jagoda, PhD, Melissa Gilliam, MD, MPH

INTRODUCTION

Moving beyond the focus on individual-level risk behaviors and disease outcomes in young people, scholars and organizations working in adolescent and sexual and reproductive health have called for to examine social determinants of health in young people's lives including schools, family and the community. Exploration of these social determinants of health underscores the need for implementing innovative methods, including arts-based practices, that can capture the lived experiences of young people who encounter high levels of social exclusion, including gender minority youth and youth of color.

Ci3 researchers piloted [Adolescent X](#), an arts-based research intervention that used story circles and body mapping to elucidate how young people understand the relationship between their social contexts and their sexual and reproductive health, with a particular focus on youth's understandings of gender, sexuality, and the body as a site of possibility and power.

Published in the journal of *Health Promotion and Practice*, the study highlights the implementation and select findings of Adolescent X. Twenty-four young people of color ages 15 to 19 were recruited from the South and West Sides of Chicago for a three-day series of story circle and body mapping workshops, in which data was collected via surveys, debriefing groups, and focus groups.

FINDINGS

- Overall, the study found that young people are navigating complex ecologies surrounding their gender, sexuality, and sense of bodily autonomy and safety.
- Young people experience strong feelings of unsafety related to how their bodies are gendered, sexualized, and racialized in different social settings.
- Adults and institutions like schools foster youth safety, but also contribute to their feelings of unsafety.
- Young people identified strategies to cope with their complex realities, including cultivating strong relationships with friends and family members to support them.

IMPLICATIONS

Our research contributes to the current understanding in research about the use of arts-based methods to explore sensitive topics related to health among young people. Through story circle and body mapping workshops, young people acted as key informants about their own lived experiences that ultimately resulted in insights around harassment and violence in their social contexts.

Read the full article [here](#).

For more information, please contact **Ci3** at ci3info@bsd.uchicago.edu