

Part I: What is the topic? What is the significance of the issue?

My research topic revolves around alcohol addiction among the Asian-American male population residing in the Contra Cost County. I believe this topic is important because many Asian-Americans dealing with substance addiction continue to be underestimated and under treated. Asian cultures are very private about their substance abuse and do not seek resources or medical assistance for addiction which also causes an underestimation in the statistics. I chose to research the Asian-American group because I am of Asian-American descent and want to learn more about how to reduce and prevent alcohol or substance addiction. I am also interested in the age group of 21-30 years old, who are second-generation immigrants and are addicted to alcohol. I chose this topic because as an Asian-American female, I have witnessed first-hand the pain and hardship that alcohol addiction can cause and wanted to learn more about what can be done to prevent alcohol addiction. I have always been interested in alcohol addiction and how it affects people because my thought was that someone can always stop drinking whenever they wanted. However, after speaking with my interviewee, I've learned that this is not always the case. The goal of my research is to remain objective and unbiased while providing my interpretation of the results. My objective is to uncover some of the beliefs and misconceptions in the Asian-American culture and the views they have on alcohol addiction.

My friend, Jac, is a 30 year old Asian-American male whom has struggled with alcohol addiction since the age of 16. He was born and raised in the Bay Area California and has lived here his entire life. He is the second youngest of 5 siblings and he has 3 brothers and 1 sister. He currently resides in Concord, California with his long term girlfriend. I met my friend, Jac, when we were 13 and 14 years old. He was athletic, vibrant, and full of life. However, we fell out of touch for almost 10 years after I had moved away. I moved back to the Bay Area California a few years ago and we were actually able to rekindle our friendship. It wasn't for a few months of catching up that I witnessed Jac's alcohol addiction and still till this day, he has yet to actually admit to me that he is an alcoholic.

I sat with Jac on two separate occasions; once in the comfort of his own home and the second time over coffee. Jac identifies himself as an Asian American male who had always had a strong connection to his cultural roots. He doesn't consider himself very religious because his parents do not necessarily practice it every day. He grew up in a very traditional Vietnamese family with his parents being first-generation immigrants. Up until he started experimenting with alcohol, he was a good student, obedient child, and was social among a lot of friends. He never thought that drinking was a problem because of how it was socially accepted among his culture and peers. He began drinking at the age of 16 years old but his alcohol addiction didn't actually start until he was 21 years old. He started drinking with his older cousins at social events but he said that it was very seldom and he never became intoxicated.

Part II: Cultural Beliefs and Attitudes or Experiences

His parents are first generation immigrants from Vietnam and he often found that their cultures clashed. Speaking to him about his cultural beliefs was very interesting because he said that alcohol consumption was accepted, to a certain extent. This is similar to how Laura Bohannon (1966) in *Shakespeare in the Bush* because she stated that in the African culture, "people began to drink at dawn and by midmorning the whole homestead was singing, dancing, and drumming." This is an example of how cultures, like that of the Vietnamese, accept

drinking as a pass time and is even accepted no matter the time of day. When asked about his cultural beliefs, he stated,

“Growing up, my family and friends often consumed alcohol at ritualistic and social events including birthday, baby showers, and funerals. It never seemed like a problem because it was accepted for us to drink, especially if we were around family.”

The Vietnamese culture accepts the male population to consume alcohol, even if they are under the legal drinking age. However, if a female drank alcohol, she was considered defiant and was looked down upon. Therefore, growing up around alcohol, he believed it had no negative connotation associated with alcohol.

Alcohol addiction is no different than that of any other drug addiction. Its characteristics mimic that of illicit drugs because it can result in addiction and impaired judgment. Often times, addicts try to become sober but their urge is too strong that they eventually revert back to their addiction. When discussing his experience with alcohol and attempts for sobriety, Jac states,

“I’m constantly surrounded by people that drink and alcohol is always present at every event I go to. It’s hard to stay sober when alcohol is always there! It’s not like I want to be like this. I want to be at a point where I can drink and not have hangover for days or even at some point just quit. It’s not like I want to drink, it’s just that my disease (referring to his addiction) gets the best of me sometimes, well most of the time. I always try to not binge drink but once I start I just can’t stop until it’s too late.”

This reminds me of the story of Vincent Caselli and his addiction to eating in *Compilations: A Surgeon’s Notes on an Imperfect Science* (Gawande, 2002). Caselli was struggling with his weight and tried to go on numerous diets but often times found himself gaining all the weight, or even more, back. Caselli also stated that eating made him feel good instantaneously which is similar to Jac when he wants to feel better so he consumes alcohol.

Part III: Myths, Perceptions and Values

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders (AAPI) has experienced an increase problem with substance abuse. The rate of drug treatment admissions for the AAPI population has increased by 37% between 1994 and 1999 (Niv, Wong, Hser, 2007). This could also be due to the cultural and family values that addiction brings shame to the family which leads them to cope with the substance abuse privately (Niv et al, 2007). The AAPI population would rather cope with the addiction within the family instead of seeking help from substance abuse treatment services (Niv et al, 2007). The myth or stigma has caused substance abuse within the AAPI population to be largely ignored because the minority model theory portrays the AAPI population as an exemplary racial group with minor substance abuse problems (Niv et al, 2007).

When we discussed his concept about drinking myths perception among the Vietnamese culture, Jac did acknowledge that any addiction can bring shame to the family. He said that, for the most part, he had always hid his addiction from his family because of fear that he will disappoint them.

“My parents are very traditional. My mom doesn’t drink at all and my dad only drinks at special occasions. At first, they never said anything to me about drinking because I only drank at family functions. However, it got to the point that they would have to hide the alcohol from me at parties or

events because they didn't want me to drink too much that I would cause them shame or embarrassment."

I wanted to see how Jac perceived his drinking habits and whether or not he thought that he had a drinking problem? He stated,

"I don't think I'm an alcoholic. I like to drink with my friends on the weekends and know that I can control it. I know that sometimes I drink a little too much but I know that I can taper off my drinking and I'll be okay."

His perception of alcohol addiction seems slightly skewed as well because he said that everyone that he knows consumes alcohol on a regular basis. Therefore, his perception of alcohol is that it is more of a norm than a problem since alcohol is socially accepted among his friends and family. This could also be a factor in his alcohol addiction.

As in *The Spirit Catches you and you Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1998), the AAPI can relate to Lia's parent who felt as though the doctors were to blame for their child's declining health. This is also the same belief among the AAPI community and that is why they would rather trust Chinese Medicine versus Western Medicine. Jac agreed.

"My parents never knew about rehab or treatment programs. They just simply tried to take everything away from me. They took my wallet, cell phone, and car away in hopes that this would prevent me from getting alcohol. This didn't stop me, I was still able to walk to the store to buy alcohol but sometimes I would steal it if I didn't have any money. The more they did this, the angrier I became with them and eventually just continued to drink in spite of them."

It was very interesting to notice that his parents didn't necessarily try to help or support him through his alcohol addiction but more try to restrict him. There needs to be more awareness about substance abuse and alcohol addiction in the AAPI community because the access to resources can help to reduce the rate of alcohol addiction.

The value of the Vietnamese culture is strictly black or white and there's really no gray area. In the Vietnamese culture, women that drink are considered defiant, promiscuous, and are looked down upon. However, if she does not consume alcohol and participate in the women roles of childbearing and housekeeping than she is considered "good." I asked Jac about his opinion on this and his reply was,

"I don't see what the problem is with drinking. All of my female cousins and friends drink alcohol but it's not like they're bad people. I think that any gender should be able to drink and not be judge but they (referring to his parents) are just old fashion. That's why they say that girls shouldn't drink."

According to Jac, the Vietnamese culture is very judgmental and anything that causes shame is looked down upon. He said that his parents didn't want people to know about his drinking habit because they didn't want to "lose face" or "*muc mat*" in Vietnamese. This is what leads them to keep the addiction within the family and try to fix it themselves versus seeking medical help.

Part IV: Religious Beliefs and Ethics

Growing up, he was raised believing in the Buddhist religion. His parents would have ritualistic events, what the Vietnamese called "*Cung*" which is a family fathering to remember anniversary of an ancestor's death. At these events, family members gather around to give

offerings of food and drinks to the spirits in honor of their passing. Often at these events, alcohol is not only offered to the spirits but the family members will often consume alcohol as they enjoy each other's company. To Jac, this made drinking seem more of a norm within his culture and that's what shifted his beliefs about alcohol. As Jac was explaining this event to me, it reminded me of the event in *The Spirit Catches you and you Fall Down* (Fadiman, 1998) when Lia's family held a ritualistic event to try to get her spirit back. The family and friends gathered in their apartment and slaughtered chickens as offerings to the spirits to help guide Lia's spirit back to her body (Fadiman, 1998).

I also wanted to discuss with Jac how alcohol fits into his life and see the social and cultural patterns of drinking and alcoholism. Cultures often intersect with ethics but cultural norms often influence moral and what is cultural accepted. Among the Vietnamese culture, the set of moral principles is that drinking is accepted during social events and only in moderation. Therefore, if you drink outside of social events, especially alone, is considered bad. Woman should not drink because it considers them promiscuous and any type of substance abuse or addiction will bring shame to the family. Jac, however, doesn't believe in any of these cultural ethics that the Vietnamese culture practices because his beliefs are more influenced by the Western culture that consuming alcohol, no matter the gender, is accepted if done responsibly.

References (APA)

- Bohannon, Laura. (1966). *Shakespeare in the bush: An American anthropologist set out to study the Tiv of West Africa and was taught the true meaning of Hamlet*. Pick from the Past: Natural History
- Fadiman, A. (1998). *The spirit catches you and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures*. New York: Noonday Press
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- Niv, N., Wong, E.C., Hser, Y. (2007). *Asian Americans in community-based substance abuse treatment: Service needs, utilization, and outcomes*. Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com.proxylib.csueastbay.edu/science/article/pii/S0740547207000062> on December 1, 2015

Informed Consent (First Page)

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To Students: This is a sample informed consent form. Each student must change the content to reflect his/her study. Please make three copies of this form, sign them all and have your participant/informant also sign them all. Keep one copy for your files, give one copy to your informant and hand in one copy with final paper.

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

I, Jac Nguyen, agree to be part of a study on Alcohol Addiction among Asian-American males in the Contra Costa County. It is my understanding that the following conditions apply:

A. PURPOSE
This research is part of a class assignment resulting in a student paper at Cal State University East Bay (CSUEB). The purpose of the class assignment is to learn more about alcohol addiction and how it impact the Asian-American male population in the Contra Costa County.

B. PROCEDURE
This is an exploratory interview (or participant-observation or both), which will be conducted on November 21st and November 28th, 2015. The following issues will be discussed: cultural beliefs, myths and perception, and religion and ethics. The interview will take approximately 1-1.5 hours each interview, at a convenient time to participate, and in a minimum of one session. The interview(s) may be audio or video taped but this was discussed in advance and your agreement was necessary.

C. BENEFITS
My participation in this study will help me learn about alcohol addiction and how it affects the Asian-American male population. It may also help other students in that general information will be shared with my classmates about this study.

D. RISKS
There are no physical and no anticipated psychological risks associated with participation in this research. As a participant, I may refuse to discuss any topic that causes distress or that seems an invasion of privacy with no negative consequences.

E. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY
I understand that strict confidentiality will be maintained. I also understand that no names will be included in the research paper—unless I agree in writing otherwise—and all notes and field notes will be stored in a locked

Informed Consent (Second Page)

Self-Evaluation

I initially took this class because it was a requirement for my Health Science degree. I chose anthropology out of the other option of sociology of health science because I felt as though it would give me a different perspective on healthcare and medical aspects. I was very fascinated with the readings, especially *The Spirit Catches you and you Fall Down*. Most of the videos were very interesting and it opened my eyes to different views such as transgender in *Ma Vie En Rose* and the difficult cultural beliefs of cannibals in *Keep the River on your Right*. All in all, the course material from this class has definitely allowed me to view the medical aspects of healthcare in a more culturally competent and unbiased manor.

I believe that I deserve an A or an A- in this class because I made sure to stay on top of all of the readings and videos. I kept up with all of my readings and submitted all of my assignments on time or early. I used the study guide to study for both quizzes and was able to achieve an A and B. Attendance was not taken as this was an online class but I needed to check both Blackboard and Horizon email multiple times a week to make sure that I was current with any updates. This also allowed me to stay current with all of my assignments and due dates to ensure that I do not fall behind in the class.