

Hey Lady

Sexual and reproductive health utilization of Chinese immigrants women



PROJECT PROCESS BOOK
Design for Social Innovation | SVA

Thesis 2021
Sherrie Shao

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INTRODUCTION

“Why am I supposed to feel shame and socially ill, when I was physically ill?”

Preface

Break the default



I approached sexual and reproductive health when I visited a gynecological physician for the first time in my life. However, it's not a satisfying first-time experience for me in the GYN department. Until now, I can still recall the uncomfortable moments of lying down and exposing myself without formal consent. The only conversation between the doctor and me before having the pap smear is when the doctor asked: "Are you sexually active?", "Yes."

There's a long time after treatment I was sinking in frustration, shame, and self-blaming. During this time, I kept asking myself, "Why are you getting this issue?" "Shame on you that you were unable to keep self-hygiene." "You're not CLEAN."

Even though after I fully recovered, I kept feeling a fire inside sometimes. I still kept asking, but I asked different questions. I asked why I wasn't fully informed before I received the treatment; why I need to feel shame and socially ill, when I was physically ill; why my parents never told me what is sexual and reproductive health, and seems still waiting for my truly grown-up; why so many questions and confusions come out, but no one responds to it?

Thus I embarked on my thesis journey in SVA, working with Asian immigrants to explore deep-rooted shame, avoidance in sexual and reproductive health utilization. Since I witnessed an unconscious, defaulted mindset are shaping our health behaviors; I feel it obligatory to reveal the current issue and make it open to discussion, not for me, but for all the women who suffered.

The unconscious moments in life are shaping sexual and reproductive health beliefs and behaviors.



Context

No health issue can be more frustrating than sexual and reproductive health.

No health subjects can be more frustrating to women than sexual and reproductive health. In the U.S., around 44% of Asian American women will be unable to survive cervical cancer for five years after diagnosis. In New York City, only less than 34% of Chinese immigrant citizens had heard about pap smears and had undergone the GYN exam. The underutilization of sexual and reproductive health resources has become a significant cause of mortality and morbidity for Asian women.



Thus, Chinese immigrants women(or CIW) are facing a rather challenging situation on sexual and reproductive health more than ever before, and young women who fresh off the boat in the U.S., in particular, are more likely to be vulnerable and being influenced. Over 80% of interviewees during Hey Lady research expressed their concerns and anxiety about talking about SRH or visiting the doctors.

Health inequality

/ˈhelθ ,mɪˈkwa:ləti/

Health inequities are systematic differences in the opportunities groups have to achieve optimal health, leading to unfair and avoidable differences in health outcomes. The dimensions of social identity and location that organize or “structure” differential access to opportunities for health include race and ethnicity, gender, employment and socioeconomic status, disability and immigration status, geography, and more.

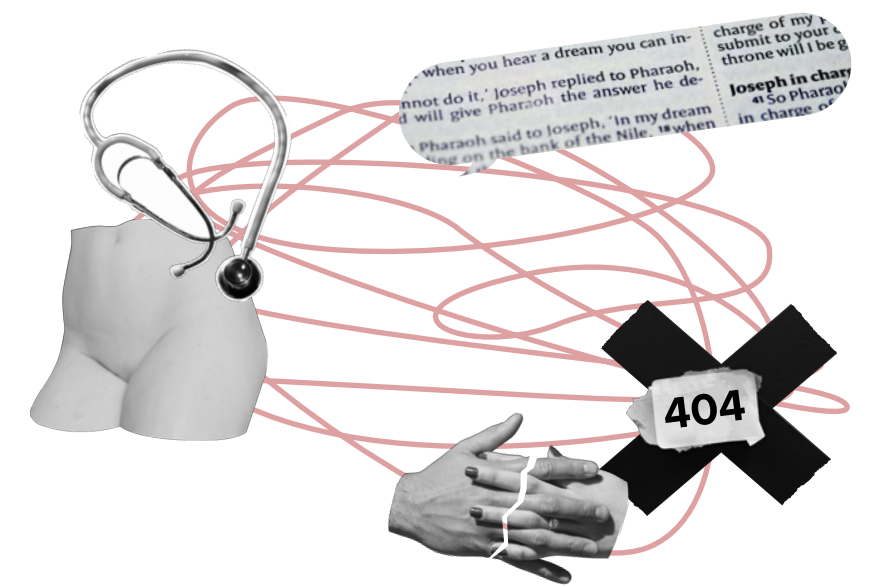
***DATA SOURCE**

1)WHO, 2011;

2)National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017

The immigrants' status, cultural and language barriers, swinging health beliefs, and high privacy and vulnerability can radicalize the tension between immigrants and the healthcare system. In this case, Chinese-born and raised women immigrants may adopt a conservative and passive way during the health-seeking process, leading to a significant loss of women's health.

Simultaneously, it will lead to health inequality on a larger scale. Due to losing access to the health system or being excluded by the health system because of identity, culture, or knowledge, Chinese immigrant women will gradually keep away from the health system, leading to worse health status. On the other hand, medical resources will be lean to the privileged groups in the system, further reinforcing exclusion on healthcare provision.



Glossary

Sexual and reproductive health

Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality and the reproductive system.

Social stigma

Social stigma is the disapproval of, or discrimination against, a person based on perceivable social characteristics that serve to distinguish them from other members of a society.

Health behavior

Health behaviors are actions individuals take that affect their health.

Health belief

Health beliefs are what people believe about their health, what they think constitutes their health, what they consider the cause of their illness, and ways to overcome an illness it.

Taboo of Sex

Adopt an evasive and passive attitude or practice towards any topics in relation to sex

Self-care intervention

Self care interventions include self awareness interventions for health promotion; self testing, screening, and diagnosis for disease prevention; and self management for better treatment outcomes.

Non-stigmatization space

A space to enable self-respect and mutual respect, autonomy, and the capacity of self-determination in people's own life.

RESEARCH

*“I don’t know why... but I won't
choose to visit a doctor if possible.”*

Process

Snapshot

30+

Hours of interaction with stakeholders

3

Interviews & conversations with health professionals

25+

Conversations with Chinese immigrants

1

Community partner engaged

18+

Academic papers referred during secondary research

Negative feelings hold them back on their health-seeking journey.

Most Chinese immigrant women's SRH health-seeking journey is twisting.

With lots concerns about exposing private details in an unfamiliar space, language problems and avoidance towards women health problems based on their cultural health beliefs, they usually felt vulnerable during the whole examination.

With a sense of humiliation, disappointment and helplessness, they will told themselves: "I'll never do it again."

More than a personal and emotional quotes, they show that several Chinese women immigrants are standing at the margin of healthcare system considering whether she is going to give up healthcare resources that should have belonged to everyone.

“I would never ever go back here again.”

--- From one of thesis interviewees



What triggers 'negative feelings' related to SRH? And what else?

I aimed to gain a general understanding of the deep-rooted causes of 'negative feelings,' which hinder Chinese immigrants women's health-seeking. For developing a quick sketch and building the connections, I chose to speak with people at the first step. By the end of the phase, I hope to develop a small interview sample to guide further research.

Thus I scoped my target community as non-immigrant/1st immigrant women aging between 20-40 years old, since young women who fresh off the boat in the U.S., in particular, are more likely to be vulnerable during big transitions on culture, environment, language and social institution.

In the end, I synthesized 5 insight statements during initial interview to further guide my research.



Chinese immigrant women SRH journey

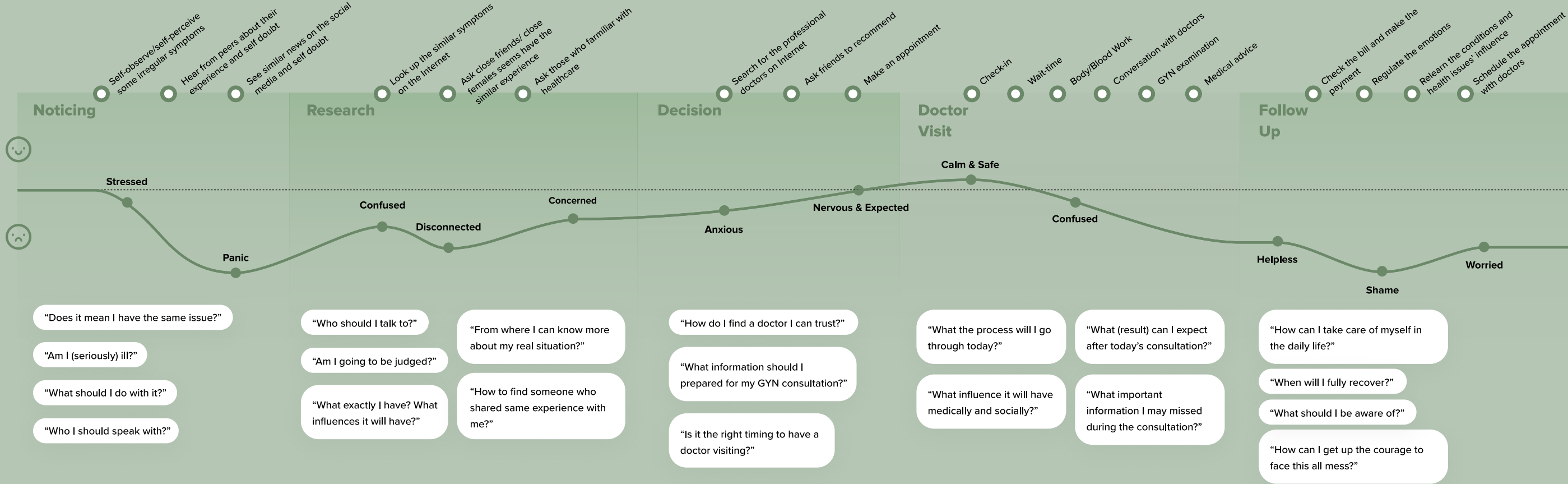
As the health journey shows, most of the confusions happen before and after doctor visiting.

In fact, approximately 70%-80% percent of people with chronic issues(including sexual and reproductive health issues) heavily rely on self-care interventions*, which happens out of the health center but is most likely to neglect.

Meet Quan



"My (sexual and reproductive) health is not always my individual health. It's about my reputation, my future motherhood, and my family."
-- Quan



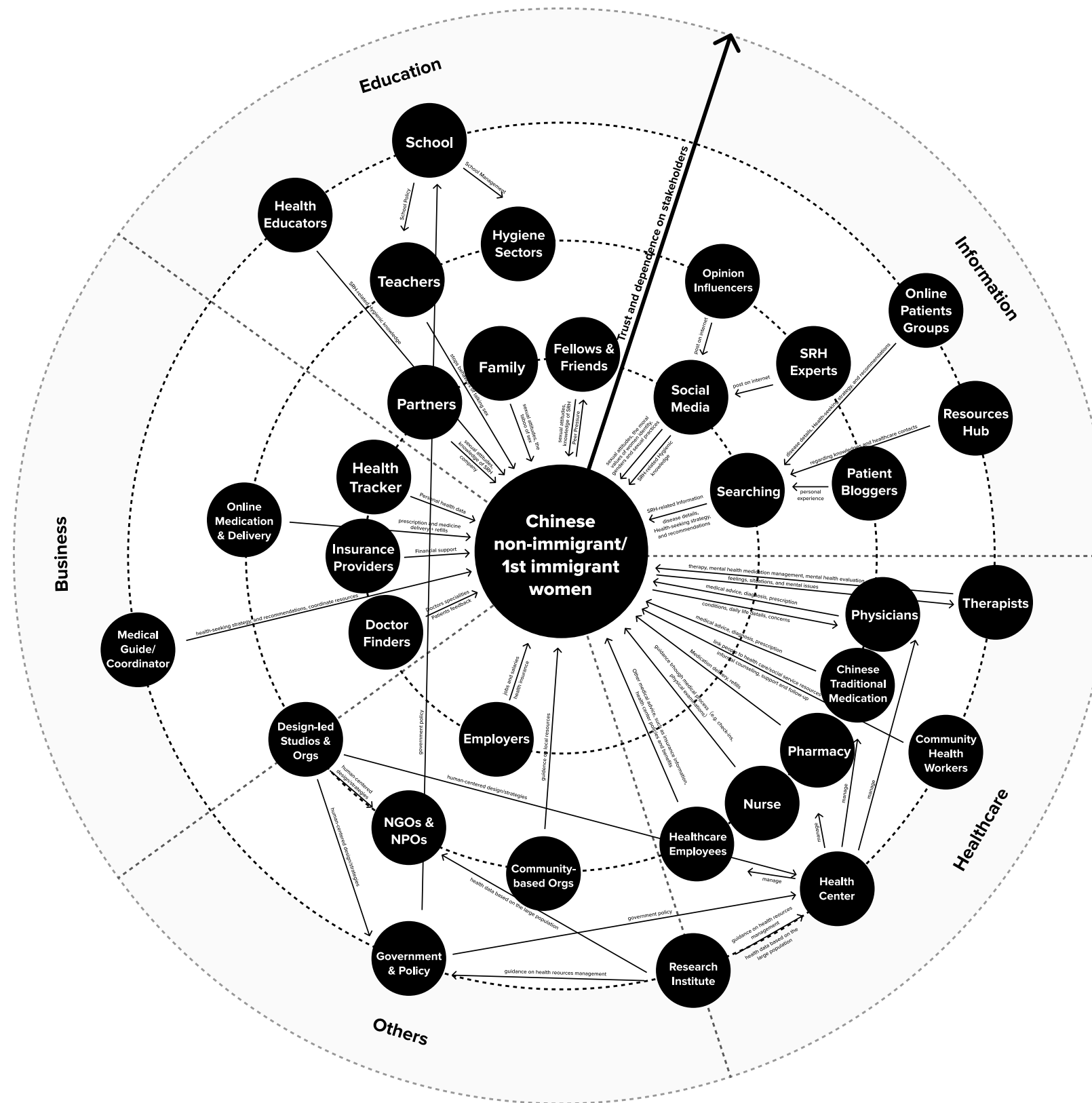
*DATA SOURCE
1)Narasimhan M, Allotey P, Hardon A. Self care interventions to advance health and well-being: a conceptual framework to inform normative guidance. BMJ2019;365:l688. doi:10.1136/bmj.l688.

What/who influences CIW's sexual and reproductive health?

Besides exposing deep-rooted cause inside individual health-seeking journey, I zoomed out to understand the current healthcare support system and service provision to Chinese immigrant women.

During this stage, I was able to have conversations with three local health professionals and several Chinese immigrants. Simultaneously, I followed with secondary research to validate and amplify my research results.

In the end, I articulated the mapping of the healthcare systems of influence to illustrate stakeholders and resources that Chinese immigrant women can access in the host country and native country.

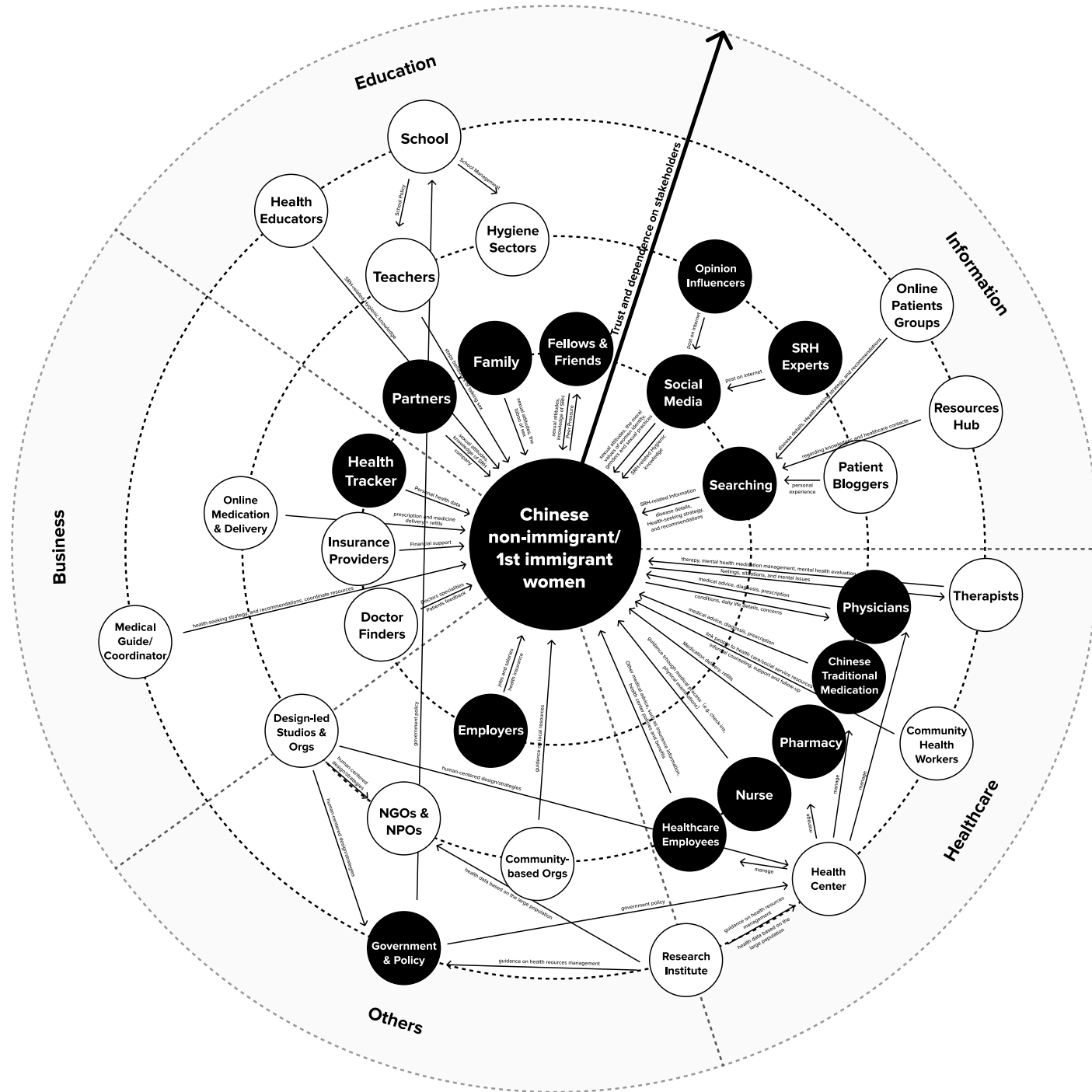


“Where should I start(my health consulting)?And where should be the end?”

--- Helen, living in U.S. for 3 years

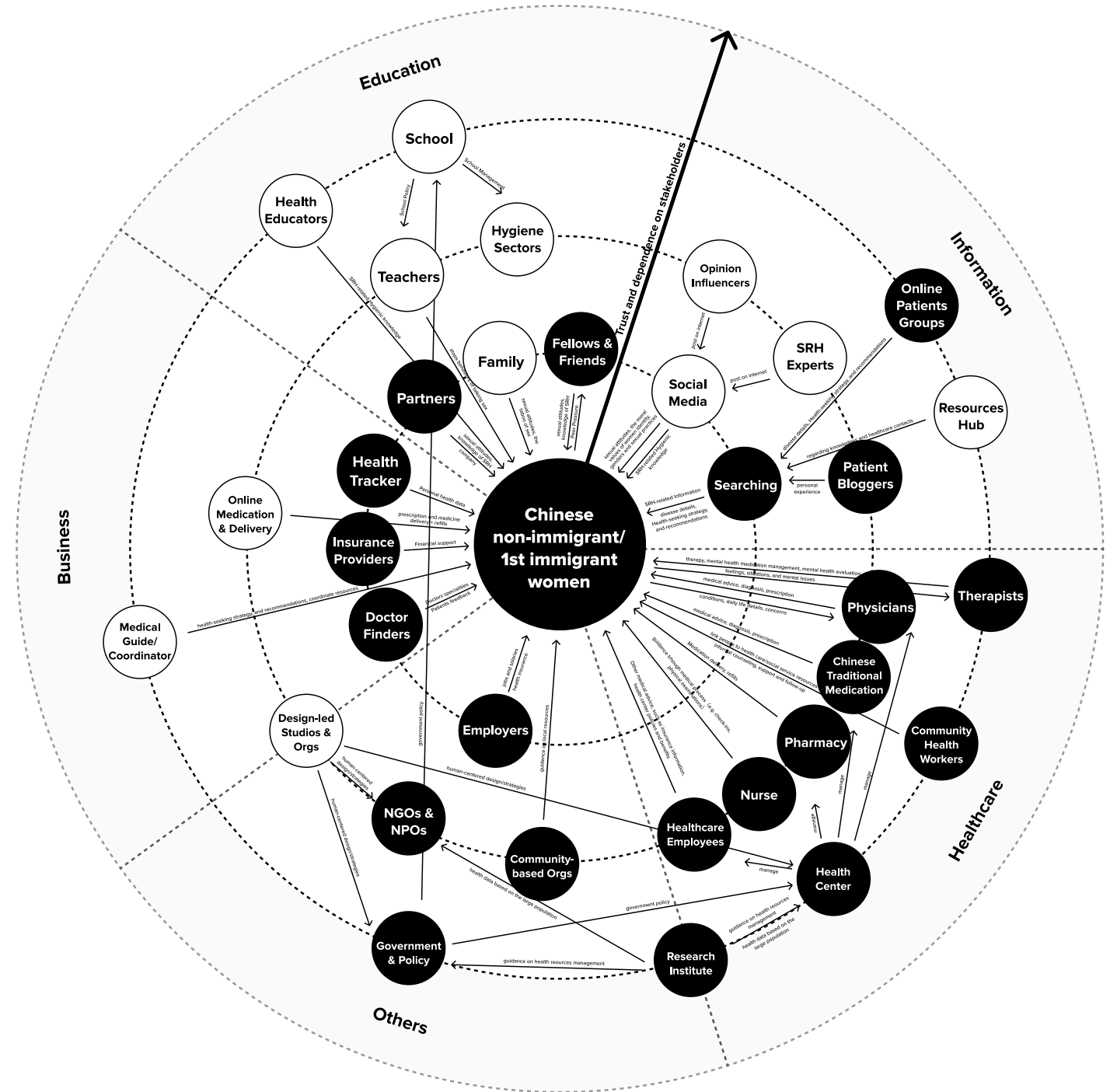
However, the fact shows that the health system presents an entirely different structure in the host country and native country. Thus, Chinese immigrants women become disoriented when looking for healthcare support when they enter into new environments.

Furthermore, there are still resources that have not yet been activated until now.



Health system of influence in China

□ Existed but never effected ■ Effected



Health system of influence in U.S.

□ Existed but never effected ■ Effected

Reframing

What are the deep-rooted causes behind health underutilization?

False belief: Afraid of being judged and fear of stigma

The fear of being judged will lead to avoidance behaviors or decision-making during the healthcare journey. Faced with stigma and guilt, most patients choose to avoid treatment or delay treatment. Simultaneously, to prevent a larger stigmatizing from groups, Chinese immigrants women decide not to seek help from their community.

Lack of awareness: “Why SRH is worth investing on?”

The targeted community hasn't perceived the significance of sexual and reproductive health. Lack of awareness usually results in poor health practice, for example, postponing the treatment and neglecting daily care.

Need for support: Disconnected with support groups and stakeholders

Chinese immigrant women are currently disconnected with the support groups. However, support matters. For those women who need to visit doctors independently, company and resonance with them physically and emotionally can eliminate fear and anxiety, helping them act boldly and timely.

Lack of navigation: Disoriented in the health system

Patients are unable to navigate themselves in the local healthcare system since they have no idea of local healthcare resources and information. Simultaneously, Chinese immigrants women tend to acquire health-related information through word of mouth.



**Health belief,
knowledge, and
behaviors
intersectionally
tie with one
another,
eventually
shaping a vicious
loop.**

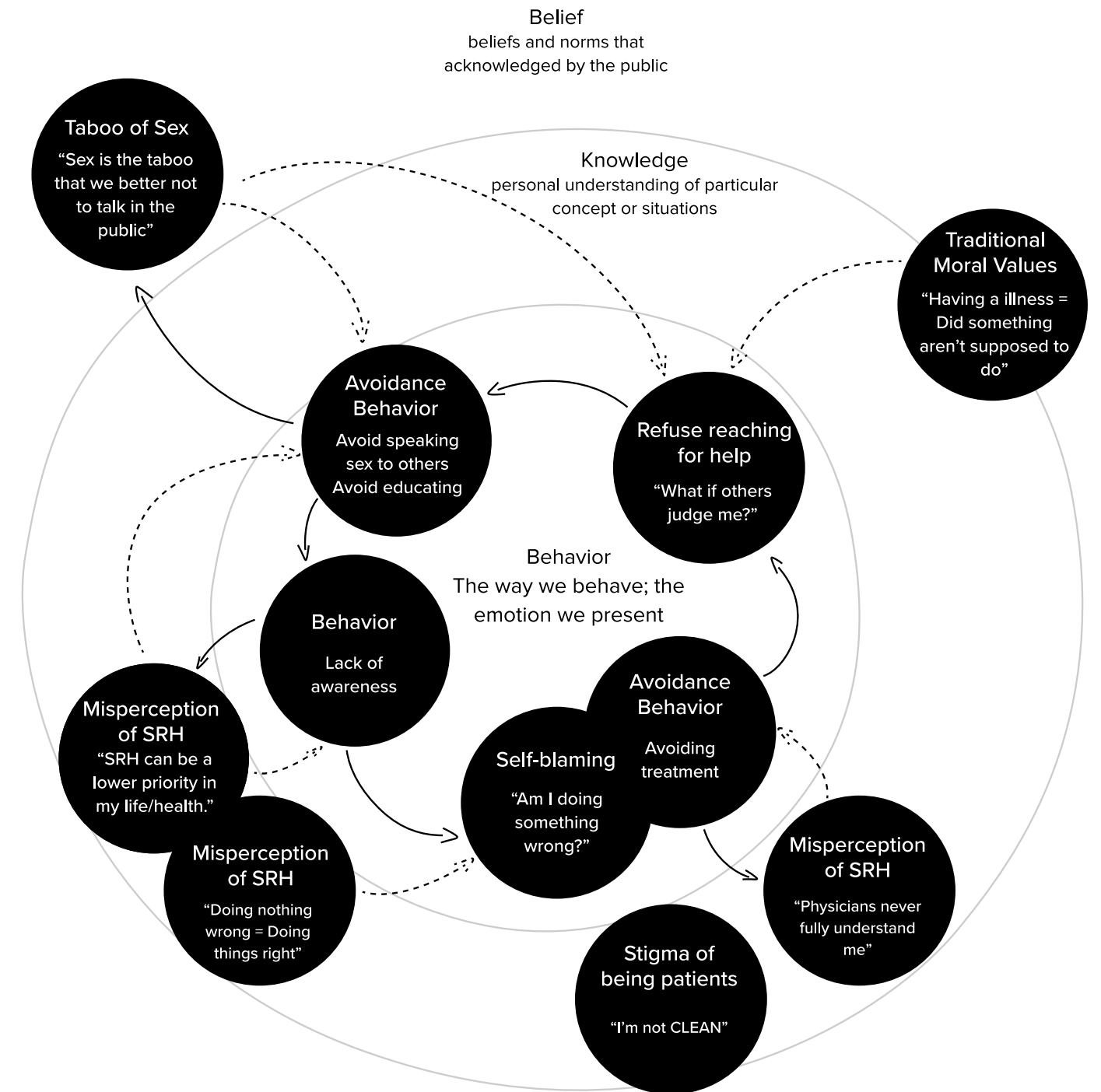
Cultural barriers and the taboo of sex promote misperception, lack of health awareness, reluctance, and avoidance to get help and speak about SRH, leading to poor health practices, which is the underutilization of healthcare resources.

What are the deep-rooted causes behind health underutilization?

In addition to synthesizing the insights, I went deeper into the mental model within Chinese immigrant women when they face SRH issues. The mental model provides the narrative and connection embedded in the prior insights.

Thus, my thesis aims to break the current problematic narrative by revitalizing the elements in this mental model.

The following diagram reveals the intersectional effect between Chinese immigrants' health beliefs, knowledge, and behavior. Unfortunately, the traditional faith and moral values are shaping the false attitudes towards SRH and stigma on patients, further driving poor health practices and misunderstanding and reluctance to reach help. Ultimately, the behaviors strengthen the health belief, reinforcing the negative influence on Chinese immigrant women's health.



CIW's mental model on SRH
Belief - Knowledge - Behavior



Problem Statement

Traditional moral values and the taboo promote internal misperception and avoidance health behavior. On the other side, the Chinese immigrants are disoriented in the external health system. A series of challenges leads to poor health practices efficiency in their daily lives.



Thesis Goal

How might we help Chinese immigrant women navigate themselves and support their peers informedly on sexual and reproductive health in their daily lives?

DESIGN

*“Well... I don't know there's
a lot I don't know!”*

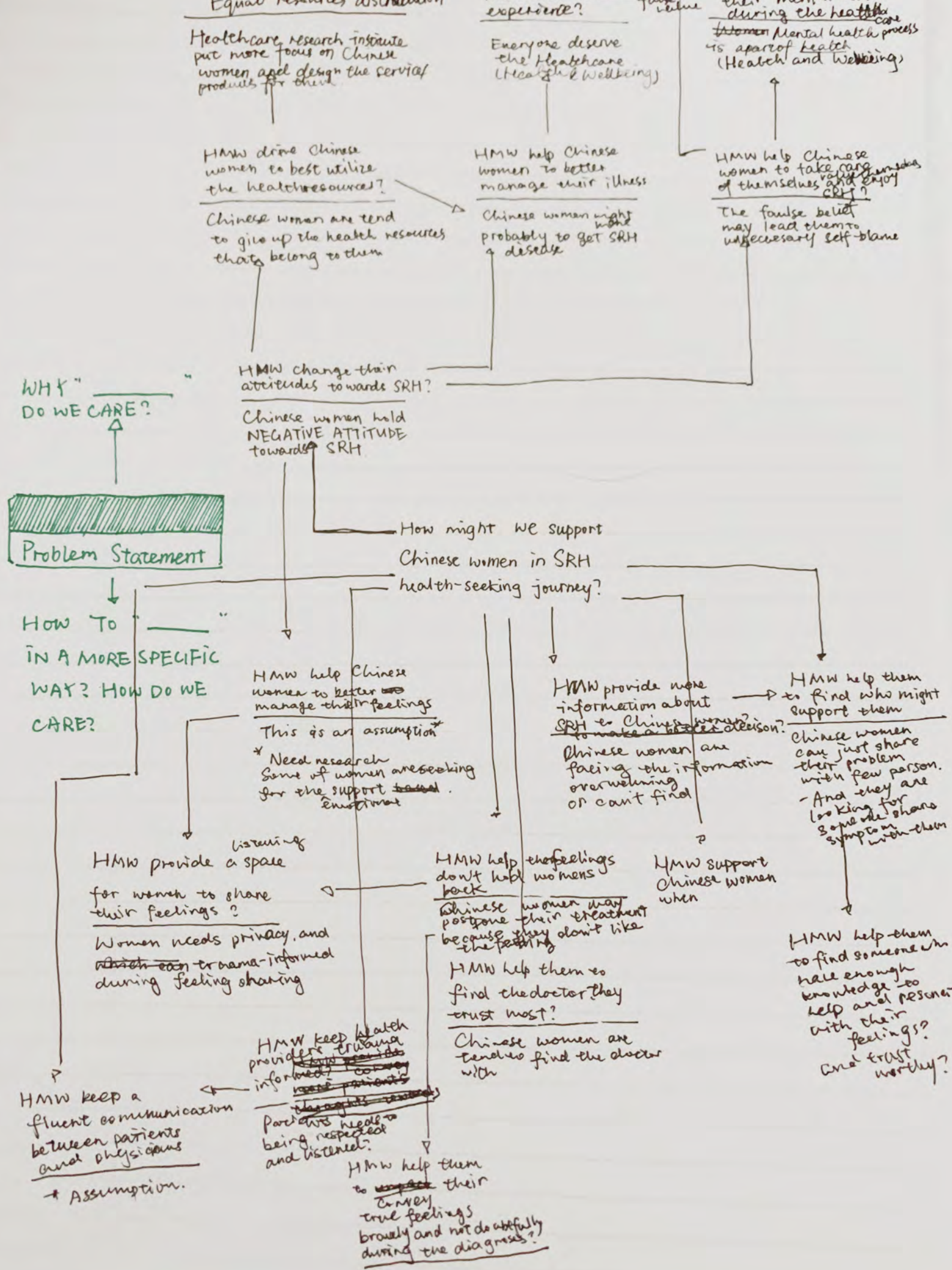
Approach

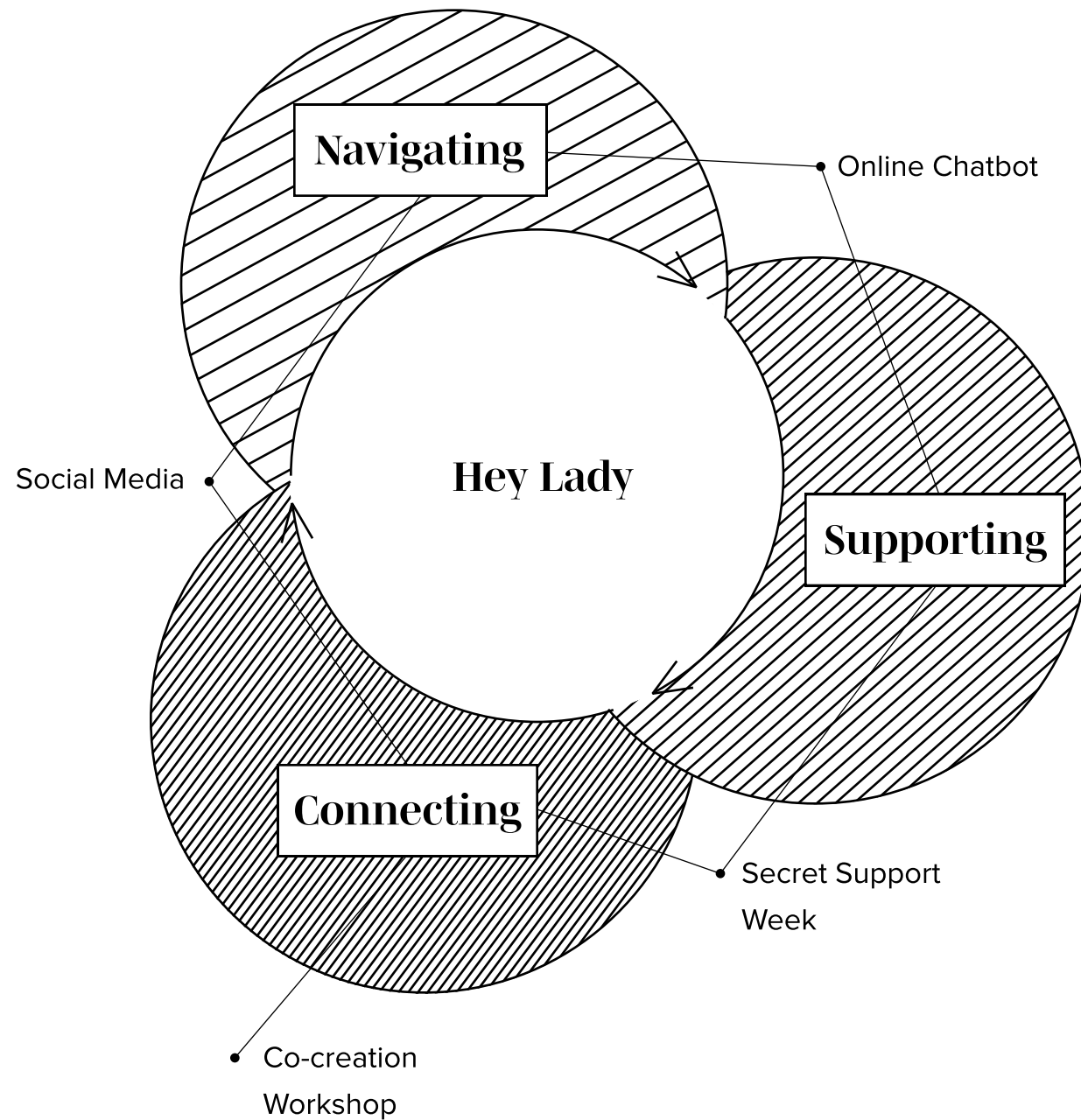
Methodology

The prior research findings demanded that Hey Lady blend professional design and research skills with community-centered thinking and leadership.

In all stages of design and implementation, Hey Lady aims has been actively communicating with community and centering their voices. Hey Lady aims to foster a shared authentic leadership among Chinese immigrant women. Through bravely expressing self stories, Hey Lady would love to share the authenticity and emotional courage among Chinese immigrants people to co-build the non-stigmatization space.

Through pre/post surveys, cultural probes, collective events, and social media posts, Hey Lady keeps iteration and evolvement through continuous conversations with the community. The project believes that navigating sexual and reproductive health is not a one-time solution, but evolving with the community. Thus, every practice is a part of the project.





'Hey Lady' strategy spaces
Supporting - Navigating - Connecting

The strategy spaces

The intervention aims to assist Chinese immigrant women navigate themselves and support their peers informedly on sexual and reproductive health in their daily lives.

To achieve this, Hey Lady follows three primary strategy spaces to direct the implementation.

Supporting

Most of Chinese immigrant women feel vulnerable, suffer from social pressure and being judged, which adds burdens to their health seeking journey. Thus, to provide a emotionally supportive and safe enabling environment for the introduction of self care interventions against stigma and social pressure is one opportunities can be developed.

Navigating

Currently, several misperceptions leads to neglect or overreaction, which would unable Chinese immigrant women to make fully informed decisions. One key opportunity is to uncover the misunderstanding and provide an informed route guide for Chinese immigrant women to navigate themselves in the health-seeking journey.

Connecting

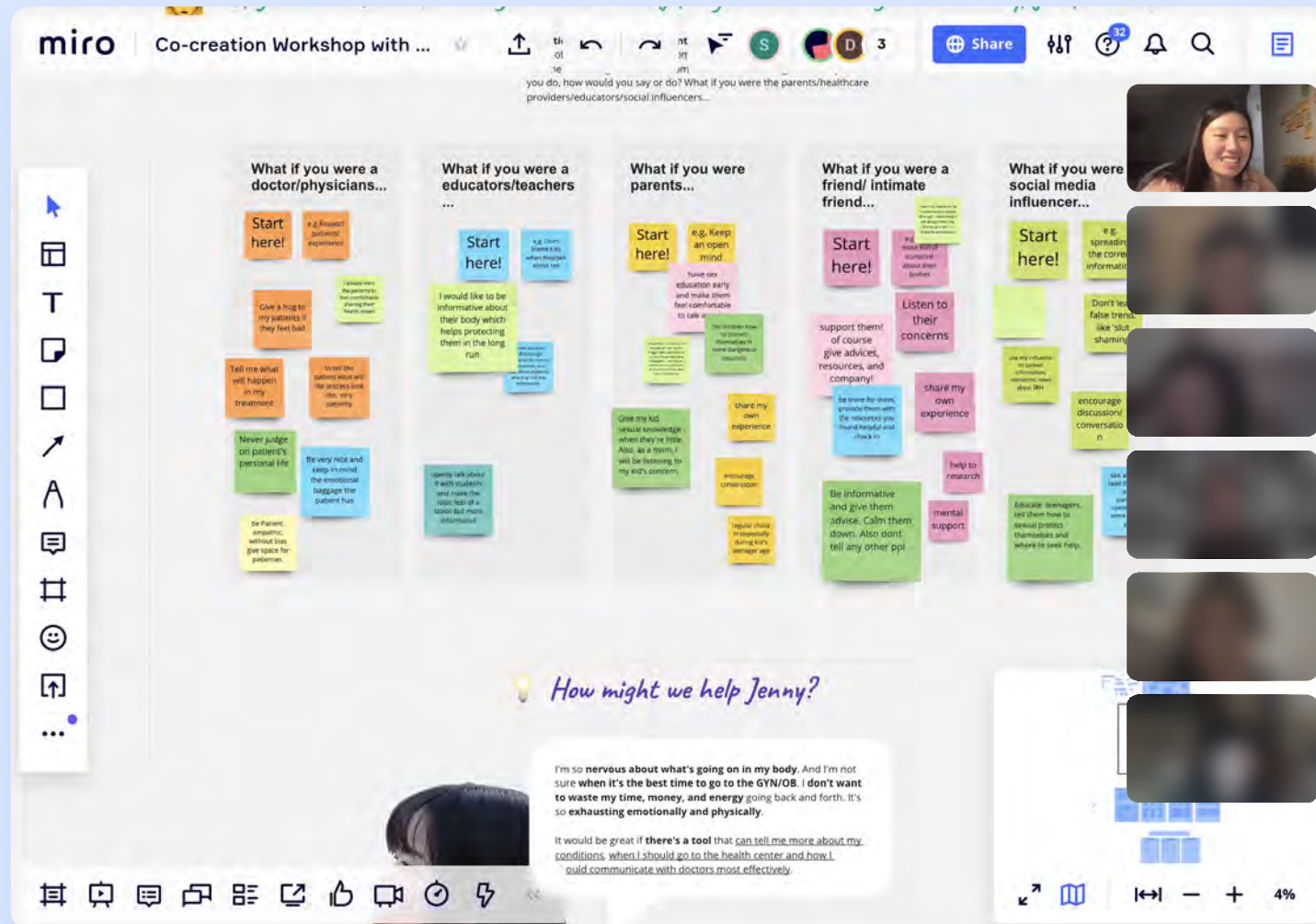
Virtual communities can be birthplace of stigma, but also can be the place for exchanging experiences, peer support, and counselling. One opportunities lays on community to mutually care and form the collective support in terms of sexual and reproductive health.



Intervention

Hey Lady

Hey Lady is online project to educate and connect Chinese immigrant women and their peers in terms of sexual and reproductive health. It consists of a series of events and services in various forms.



**Co-creation Workshop with Asian Creative Collective: Reimagine immigrant women's future on sexual and reproductive health*

Co-creation workshop with community

A free community event held on January 28th, 2021, co-hosting with Asian Creative Collective to discuss the aheading sexual and reproductive health future of immigrant women.

This workshop explores how Asian immigrant women in the U.S. can actively engage in sexual and reproductive health and what is currently hindering them. During the process, hosts and attendees could discuss the relationship between healthcare and our culture, identity, taboo, and social pressure.

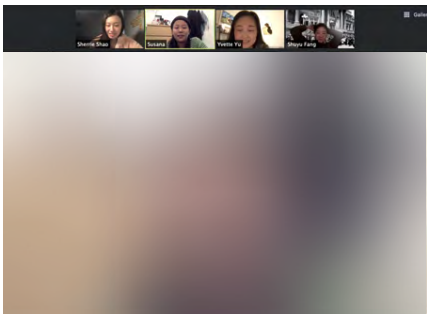
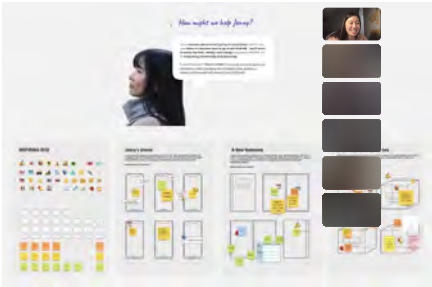


Simultaneously, the workshop encouraged attendees to brainstorm the achievable health future based on the current challenges. From various perspectives, attendees put forward multiple concepts to cater to the immigrant community's needs.

In the end, the conversation became organically driven by attendees themselves. People spontaneously shared their stories and went deeper on life learnings related to women's rights, health, and reproductive justice, beyond the workshop expectation.

More than 7 attendees showed up and the 1 hours event was extended to 1.5 hours as attendees continued to share insights.

Co-creation workshop journey



PRE-PROMOTION & SIGN UP
To confirm 7 attendances

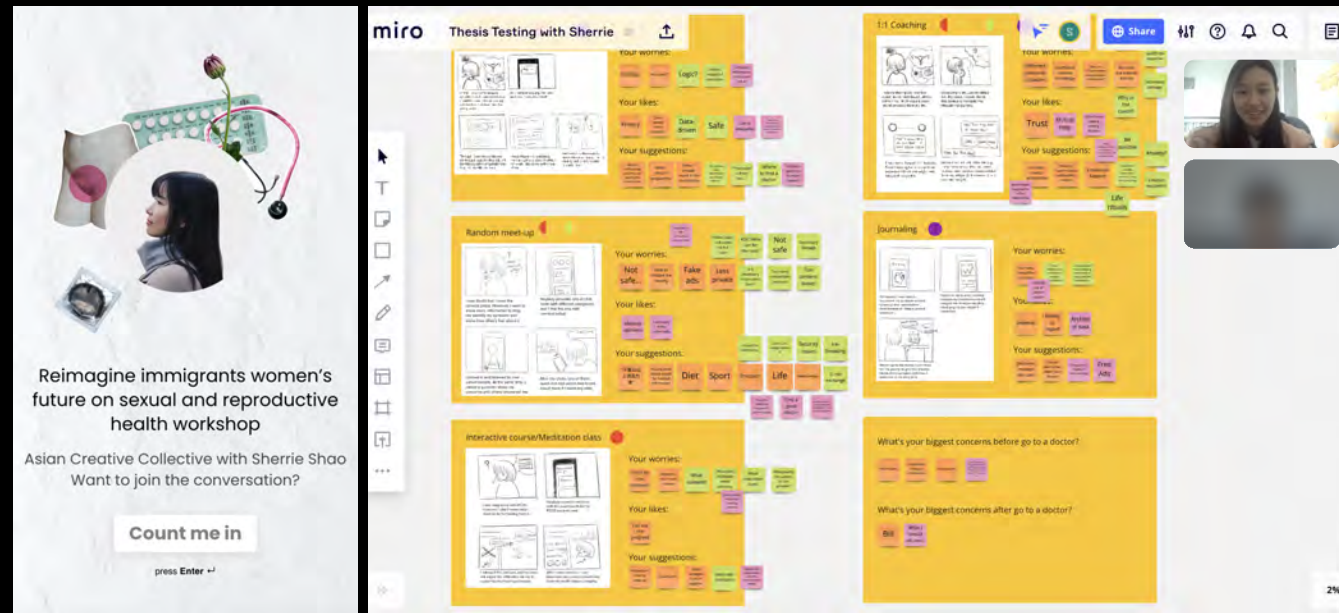
INTRODUCTION
Presentation of Hey Lady context and recent progress

WARM-UP
Warm-up activity to build the initial bonding among attendees

IF YOU WERE...
Collective reflection exercise on personal SRH experience and connection with support groups

HMW HELP JENNY
Team activity to redesign the current health system touchpoints

OPEN TALK & CLOSE
Open session for sharing new learnings, some insights not covered by the workshop



Reimagine immigrants women's future on sexual and reproductive health workshop

Asian Creative Collective with Sherrie Shao
Want to join the conversation?

Count me in
press Enter

miro Thesis Testing with Sherrie

1:1 Coaching

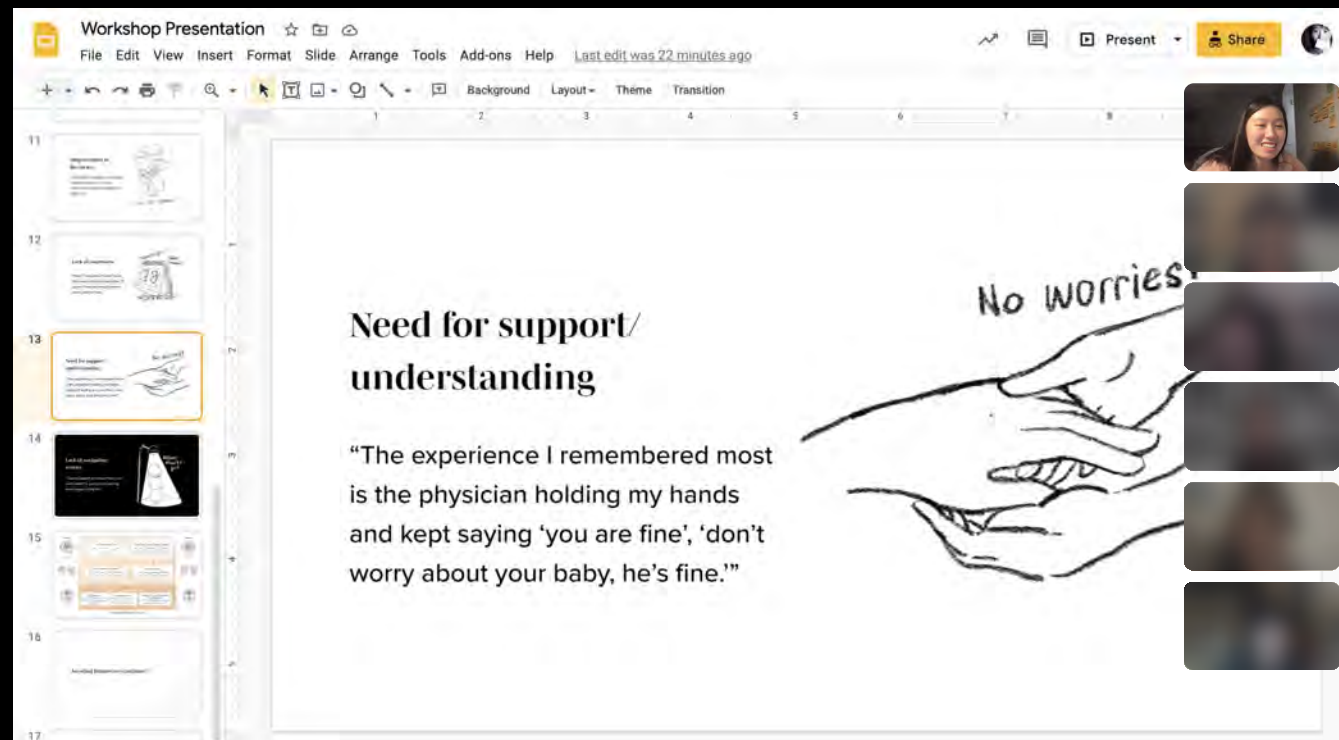
Random message

Journaling

Interactive course/Medication class

What's your biggest concerns before go to a doctor?

What's your biggest concerns after go to a doctor?



Workshop Presentation

File Edit View Insert Format Slide Arrange Tools Add-ons Help Last edit was 22 minutes ago

Background Layout Theme Transition

11

12

13

14

15

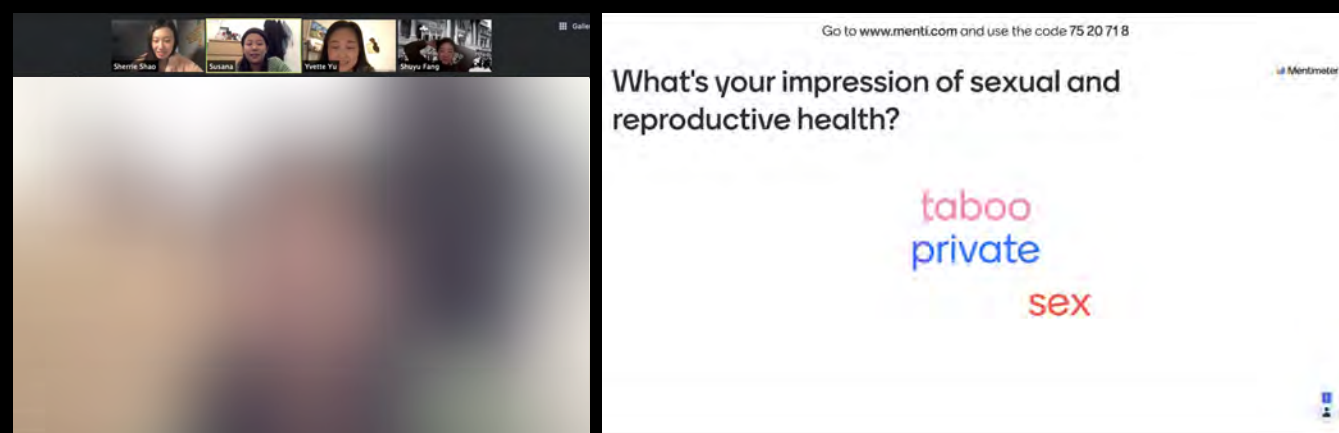
16

17

Need for support/
understanding

"The experience I remembered most is the physician holding my hands and kept saying 'you are fine', 'don't worry about your baby, he's fine.'"

No worries



Go to www.menti.com and use the code 75 20 71 8

What's your impression of sexual and reproductive health?

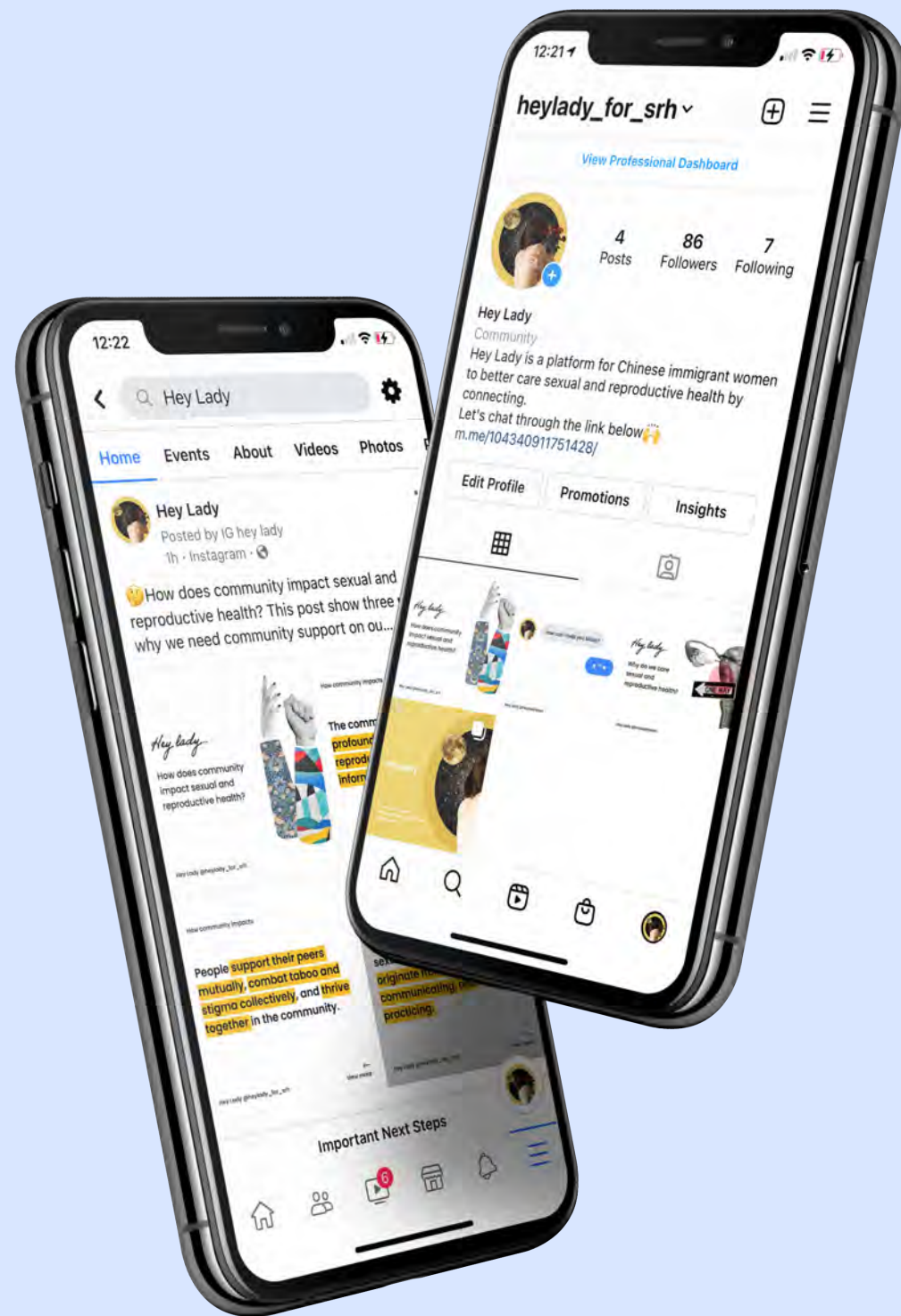
taboo
private
sex

“After starting the conversation, I realized that caring about sexual and reproductive health is necessary.”

--- From a workshop attendee

Insights

Stories are triggers. Once community started to empathize with their peers, they can easily receive the response from all sides. Through the conversation, gathering can be educational.

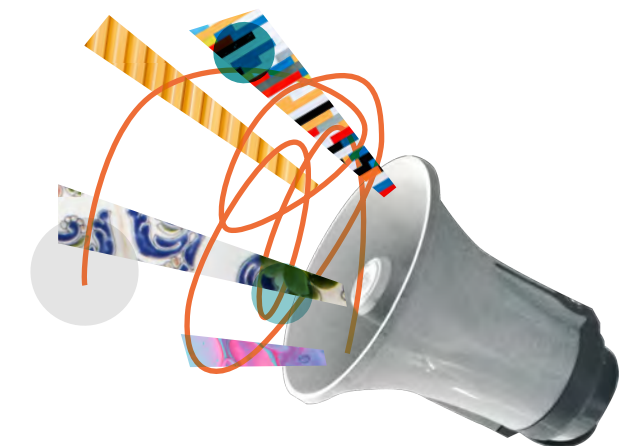


‘Hey Lady’ Community hub

Since the workshop participants has become seeds of new sexual and reproductive health community. With their support, Hey Lady started to build the community hub for Chinese immigrant women on Facebook fan page(@heyladyforsrh) and Instagram(@heylady_for_srh) by March, 2021.

Hey Lady keeps continuous communication and education with the Chinese immigrant community through social media posts, IG stories, and open calls/polls/activities, including SRH related health knowledge and collective reflection and creation activities.

Currently, over 80 people receive Hey Lady communication via social media. The account receives an average of twenty reactions per post.

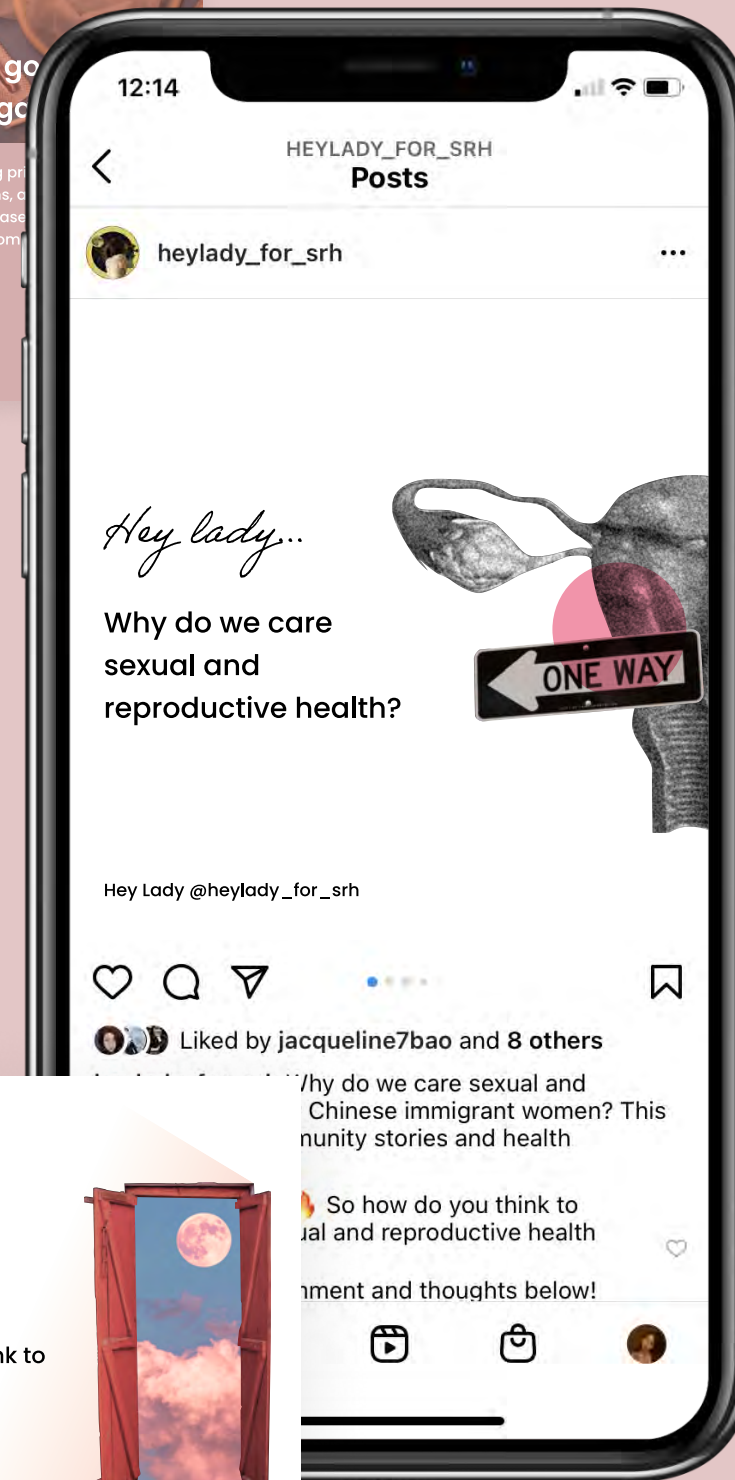
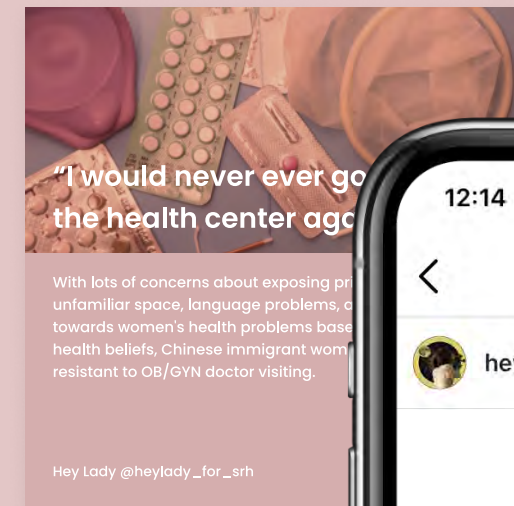


“Hey Lady is a free land we can discuss about secret health issues with no judgements, no harassment.”

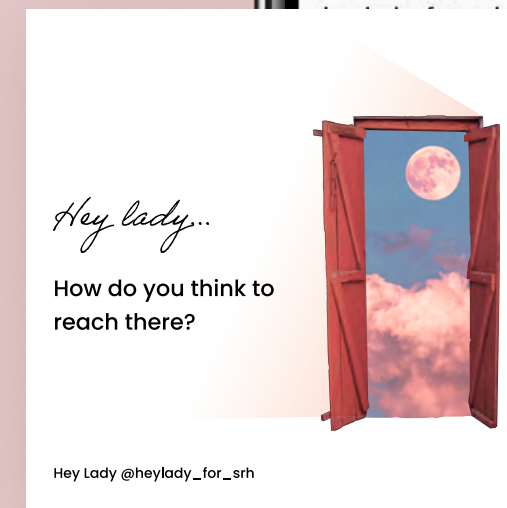
--- From a Hey Lady follower

Insights

People needs a safe communication space. The safe, open and transparent space grows the trust among community, encouraging louder voices and opinions.



...not only personal but the sign of conflicts in the health system and migrant community."

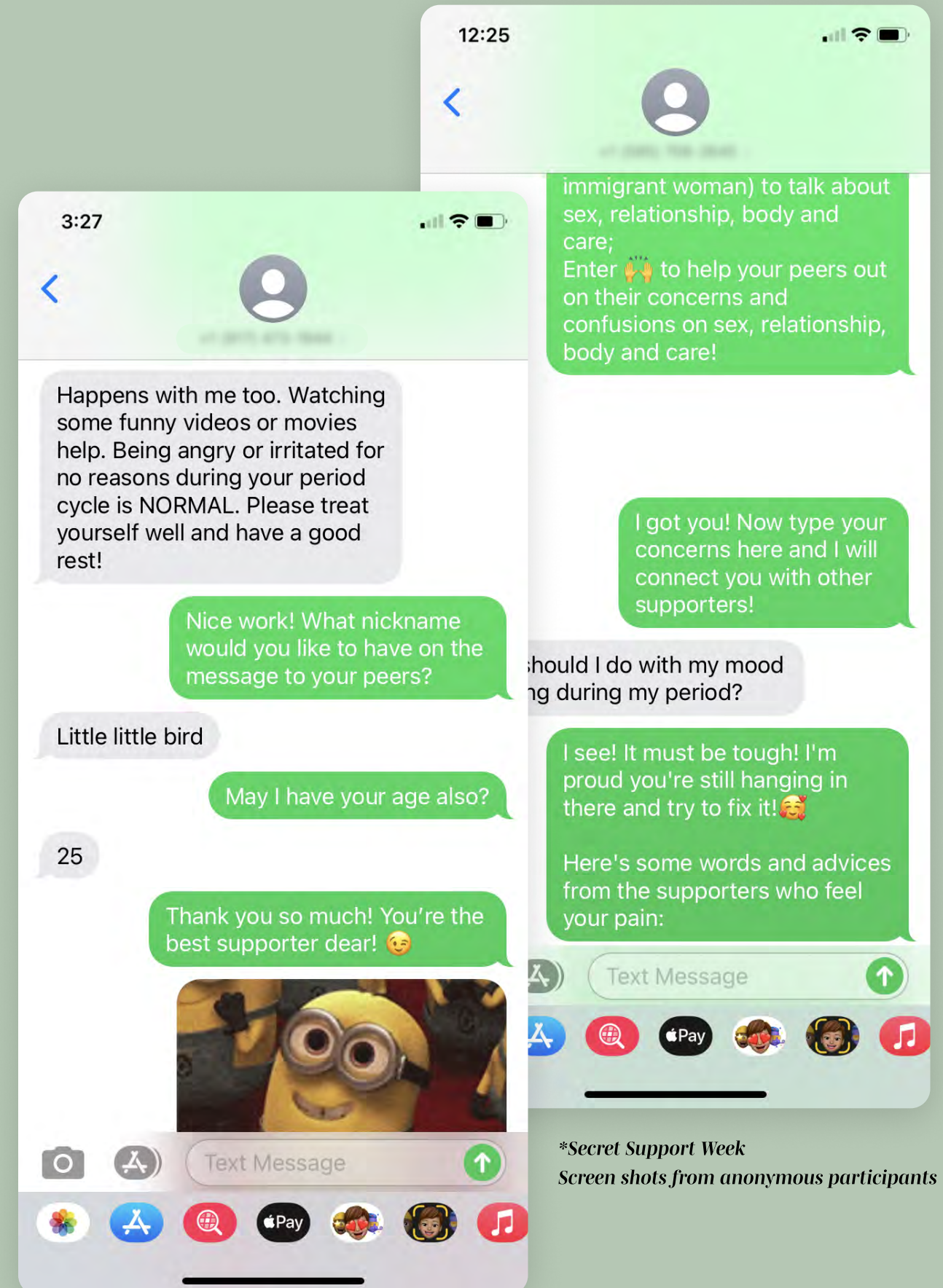


Hey lady, could you help me?

Hello dear, welcome to Secret Support Week! I heard you!

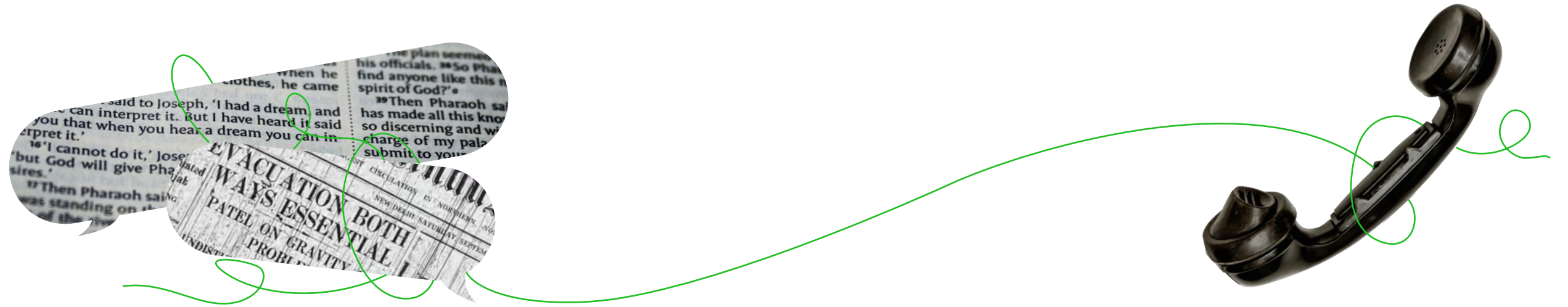
Secret Support Week is the community event to connect supporter groups around Chinese immigrant women on most secret unspoken topic: sexual and reproductive health. I am here to help you understand your issue and connect with other supporters.

Now, let me know what I can do for you! Enter 🙋 to find out more.



*Secret Support Week
Screen shots from anonymous participants

Secret Support Week



In 2021 February, Hey Lady established 'Secret Support Week' among Chinese immigrant women. Through matching questioner with answers during a week, we further connect more Chinese immigrant women to build a mutual support network.

Through messaging the Hey Lady hotline, the backend working staff directed messagers to relevant services based on their needs. Secret Support Week provides three primary services: basic health consultation, looking for SRH supporters, providing SRH supports.

Initially, 5 participants responded to Secret Support Week. Until the weekend, participation grew twice. Our hotline has been super responsive during the whole week to cater to our participant's needs.

Basic health consultation

Basic health consultation allows participant to report sexual and reproductive health issues. The hotline will interpret the symptoms and provides relevant non-medical advice after a series of questions.

**Hey Lady hotline wouldn't provide any medical advice in any case.*

Looking for SRH supporters

Looking for SRH supporters provides an anonymous space for participants to speak out their concerns or unsure facts in the form of questions.

Hey Lady hotline would help spread the questions to those supporters who can advise regarding sexual and reproductive health. The hotline will send back the message once there is any advice.

Providing SRH supporters

Simultaneously, Secret Support Week provides a channel to assist supporters' knowledge and experience better reach to those who needed it. Through messaging the hotline, backend working staff will provide supporters with the recently posted questions matching their experience. Supporters can choose the question they feel confident to help with, then provide the advice.

Secret Support Week is also the pre-test of Messenger Chatbot. The latter planned to be launched in few weeks. The activity implementation provided constructive guidance for the incoming Chatbot delivery.

“I think the bot is very sweet - it’s talking like a person... it’s great to have such a ‘middle person’ before I meet or match with someone I don’t know.”

--- From a Secret Support Week participants

Insights

Talking sexual and reproductive health is hard. People needs an agency(bot) as a facilitator of their conversation.

“Besides knowledge, I want to know what/who I can reach out to when I am sick.”

--- From a Secret Support Week participants

Insights

People are looking for a more detailed resources guide to familiarize them with local health system.



Messenger Chatbot Auntie H

Auntie H, is a online chatbot embedded in Hey Lady Facebook Fanpage(@heyladyforsrh) launched on March, 2021. The objectives are two fold, first assist the community to access the customized support or resources, and secondly receives the participants feedback to further enhance Hey Lady projects.

Chinese immigrant women can access to a chatbot Auntie H from Facebook Fanpage, to search the health resources nearby and ask support from/support their peers through anonymous Q&A.

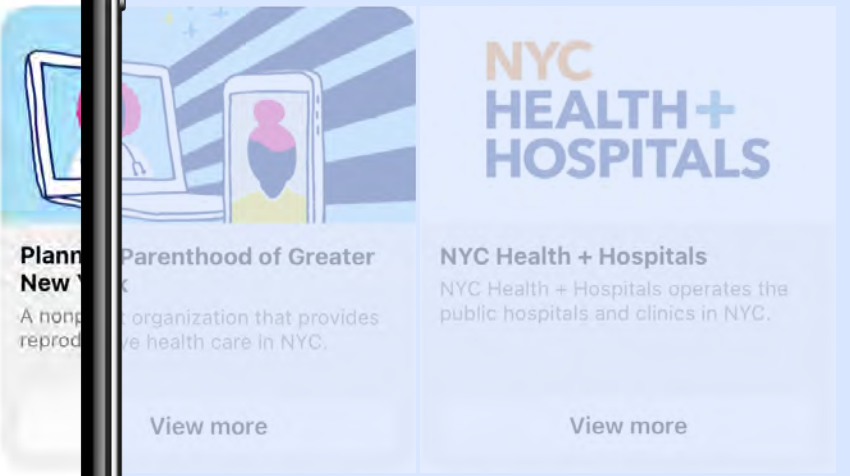
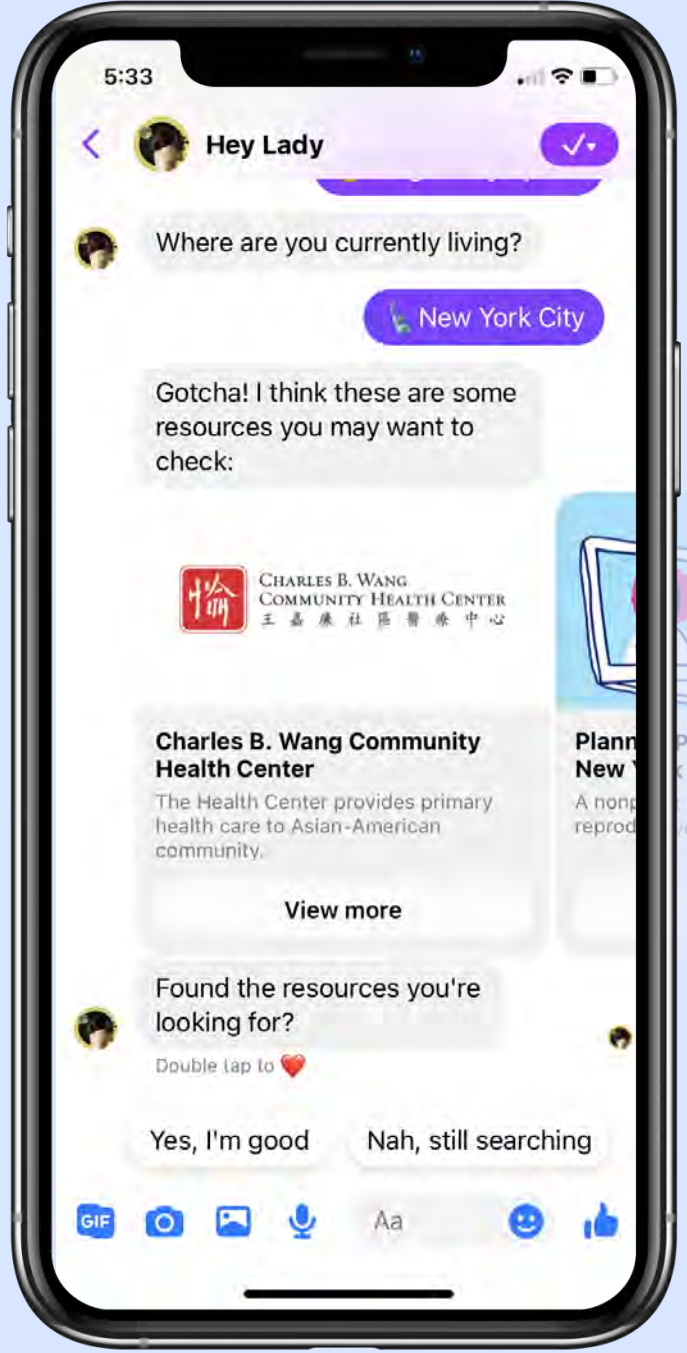
Based on the insights from Secret Support Week, Auntie H covers a wide range of resources and conversation topics, such as relationship, intimacy, body, sexuality, etc. for community to explore. So far, Auntie H was able to connect New York and San Francisco residents with local health resources.

Aside, the chatbot presents as a close auntie in people's life and support users emotionally. The conversation tone and word library have been refined several times to show up Auntie's "loving, understood, and supportive" personalities.

Currently, Auntie H helped more than 15 users and received thoroughly positive feedback from community.

Covering diverse topics and multiple resources

- Body
- Truama
- Emotion
- LGBTQ+
- Diet
- Period
- Birth Control
- Pregnancy
- Relationship
- Sex & Sexuality
- Family & Grow-up



“..Looking forward to more topics open to the public!”

“This is a completely new form of chatting women health!”

“...A well-pacing health consultation experience for me”

“Can't wait to see more health resources next time when I chat with you! I hope I could have those resources earlier when I just came to the U.S.”

“Sexual and reproductive health always ties with family, relationship, love, and intimacy...Thank you for caring for us from all aspects!”

“Auntie H brings me to another world, a world I can celebrate or cry freely for my sexual and reproductive health.”

--- From an Auntie H user

Insights

Language matters. The supportive language style and soft tone help to build the non-stigmatization safe space.

FUTURE

*“I’m curious what’s next on
my sexual and reproductive
health journey!”*

Outcome

Highlights

2

In total, Hey Lady created 2 events

2

Currently, Hey Lady launched 2 long-term services, including collective education and chatbot

80+

'Hey Lady' followers on social media

20

Average reactions under every Hey Lady social media post

36.5

Hours of interaction with Chinese immigrant women community

17+

No including social and chatbot usage, more than 17 attendees participated in 2 events.

“Thank you for putting it together and working on such an important issue.”

Hey Lady gathered first-hand qualitative data on feedback to evaluate the quality and influence of the events through direct contact, including interviews, emails, and social media. Overall, Hey Lady received thoroughly positive feedbacks from thesis partners, health professionals, designers, and target community.

As a continuously developing platform, HeyLady is able to provide the Chinese immigrant community with access to local health resources, educate Chinese immigrants on basic sexual and reproductive health knowledge and connect Chinese immigrants with their peers within a safe and caring communication space.

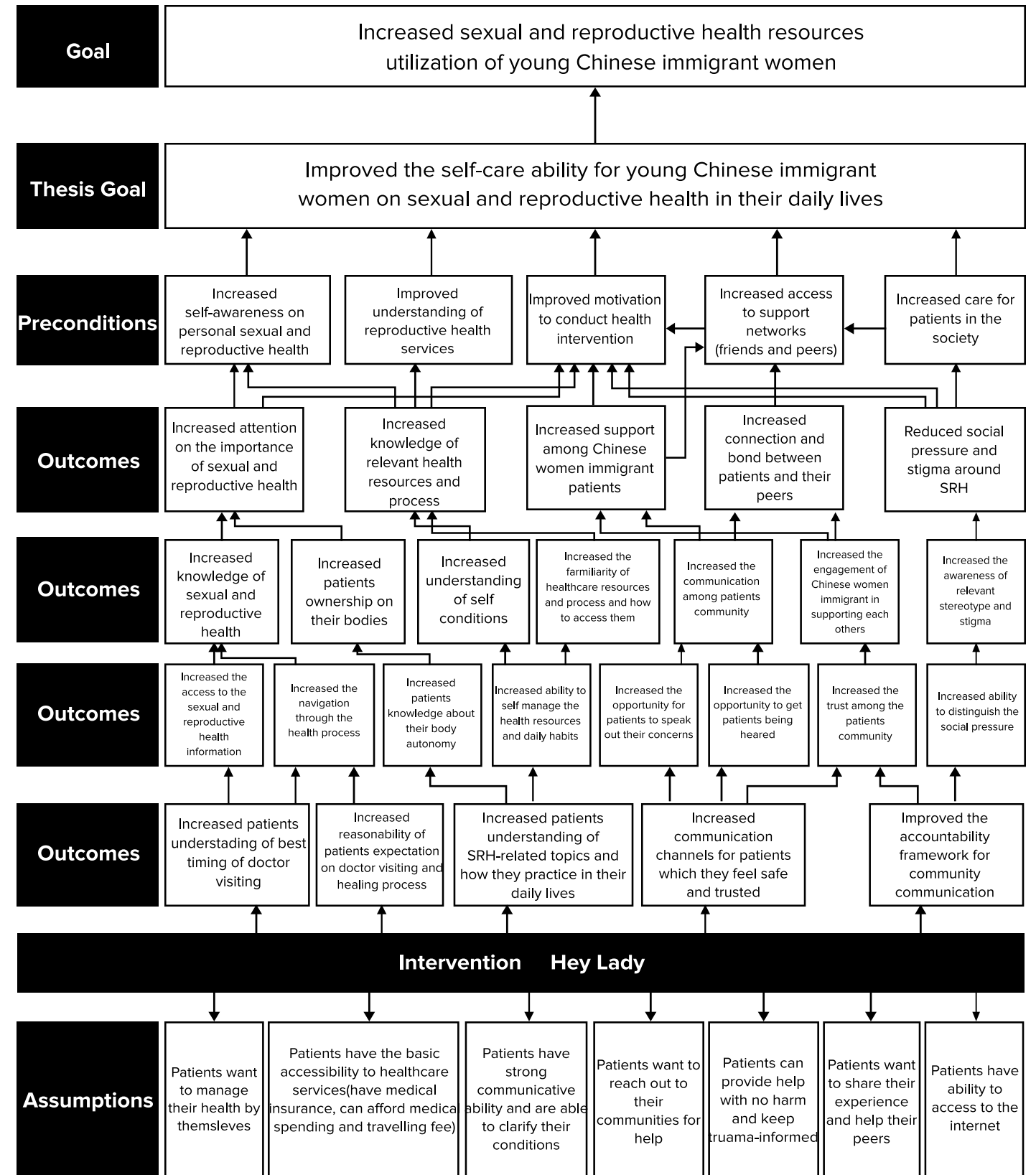


However, there are two problematic spaces Hey Lady hasn't fully covered. First is the non-organic connection between Chinese immigrant women and other health stakeholders. During the research, the ecosystem describes the community's limited access to the health system. While in the current situation, Hey Lady only provides one-way resource guidance. So far, the community cannot still spontaneously reach out to the health resources and maintain the connection with the local health system independently.

Second, a limited capacity of professional knowledge in healthcare and technology hobbles Hey Lady large-scale change in the future. Within the limitation, Hey Lady is growing at a slower pace.

Metrics & Evaluation

Theory of Change



Measure the success

Our theory of change paints a picture of how Hey Lady influences Chinese immigrant community health utilization as an intervention.

Many factors affect a young Chinese immigrant woman's ability to self-care on sexual and reproductive health including: Being equipped with self-awareness on personal sexual and reproductive health, being completely informed with the healthcare system, having the motivation to conduct health intervention, being able to access support networks, and having a patient-friendly social environment. My intervention is built upon the key preconditions, especially to improve the understanding of reproductive health services and to increase access to support networks.

The immediate outcomes of our intervention center around three following facets:

Misperception --> Awareness

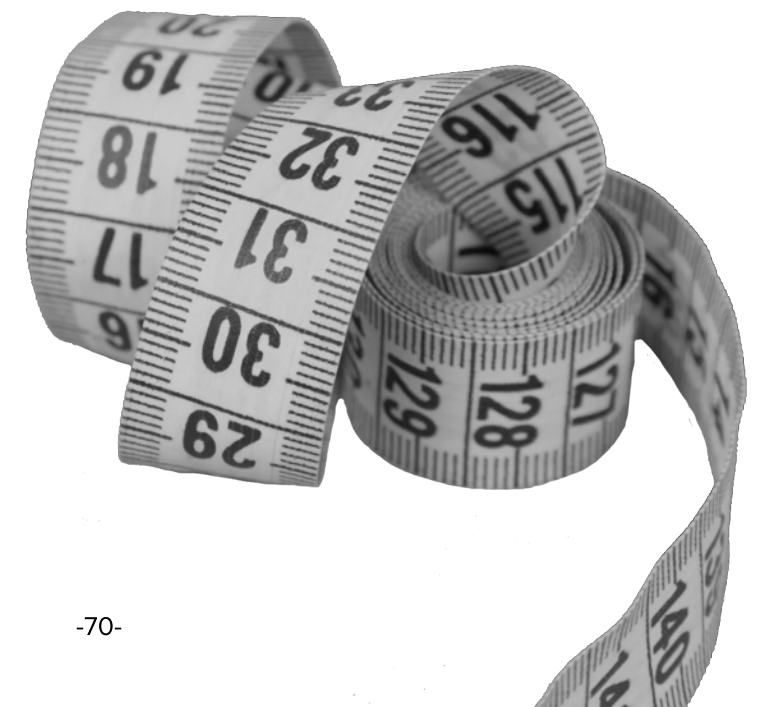
It will measure the immigrant engagement in sexual and reproductive healthcare discussion. The evaluation of the project impact will measure Chinese immigrant women are more self-motivated to engage in sexual and reproductive health discussion. The project believes that self-motivation shows the awareness of SRH importance and can bring more opportunities to learn SRH by themselves.

Lack of support --> Access to support

It will measure the immigrants' confidence on asking for support. The evaluation of the project impact will measure Chinese immigrant women become more confident to ask for help from their peers. The project believes that accessibility of external support can provide a sense of security and individual confidence to reach out for support.

Disoriented --> Prepared

It will measure the immigrant ability to manage expectation on doctor visiting and healing process. The evaluation of the project impact will measure Chinese immigrant women have stronger ability to manage their expectation on healthcare process. The project believes when immigrant are more prepared with their medical process, they will have better sense of the possible result/progress they would get in each step.



Future

Continue to build on...

The ultimate goal of the project is to increase Chinese immigrant women utilization of the local healthcare system. And currently, we just started our first step.

Learning from the prior events and design, Hey Lady envisions to continuously grow as a sustainable space to support Chinese immigrant community. The future practices lie in three directions.

Enhance the community engagement

With the goal of building deeper bondings between people, Hey Lady plans to facilitate more community-centered activities, including meetups, workshops, and creative facilitations.

Scale the platform from online to offline

Hey Lady imagines driving a larger impact in the post COVID-19 era. Hey Lady would build offline activities when physical gatherings are allowed to revitalize SRH support network in the local neighborhood.

Reach out to more resources

Hey Lady would reach out to more resources to respond to current problematic spaces, such as healthcare providers, educators, artists, to nurture the community. The purpose is to build new active dynamics between the Chinese immigrant community and the local health system.

A letter to all the thesis supporters

I started my thesis with numerous uncertainties, helplessness, and confusion - feeling so unsure of the incoming thesis journey that I doubted if I'm fully prepared for it.

Fortunately, I am not alone during my whole journey, with so many advisors, partners, and supporters by my side. Their passion and insights on women's health, immigrants' rights, and sexuality enlighten me every moment I questioned myself and the need for this thesis project. It is their assertive voices and presence that drive me determined to move the project forward.

Even though Hey Lady directed a slight impact on the Chinese immigrant community, I firmly believe it would be growing in the future. Because I know I'm not the only initiator. I have seen my community has been gathering from MY supporters being there.

Here, I would express my highest appreciation to those who engaged in my thesis journey in any form. Your engagement adds unique values to this challenging subject.

With love and appreciation,

Sherrie

Thanks

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Credits & Reference

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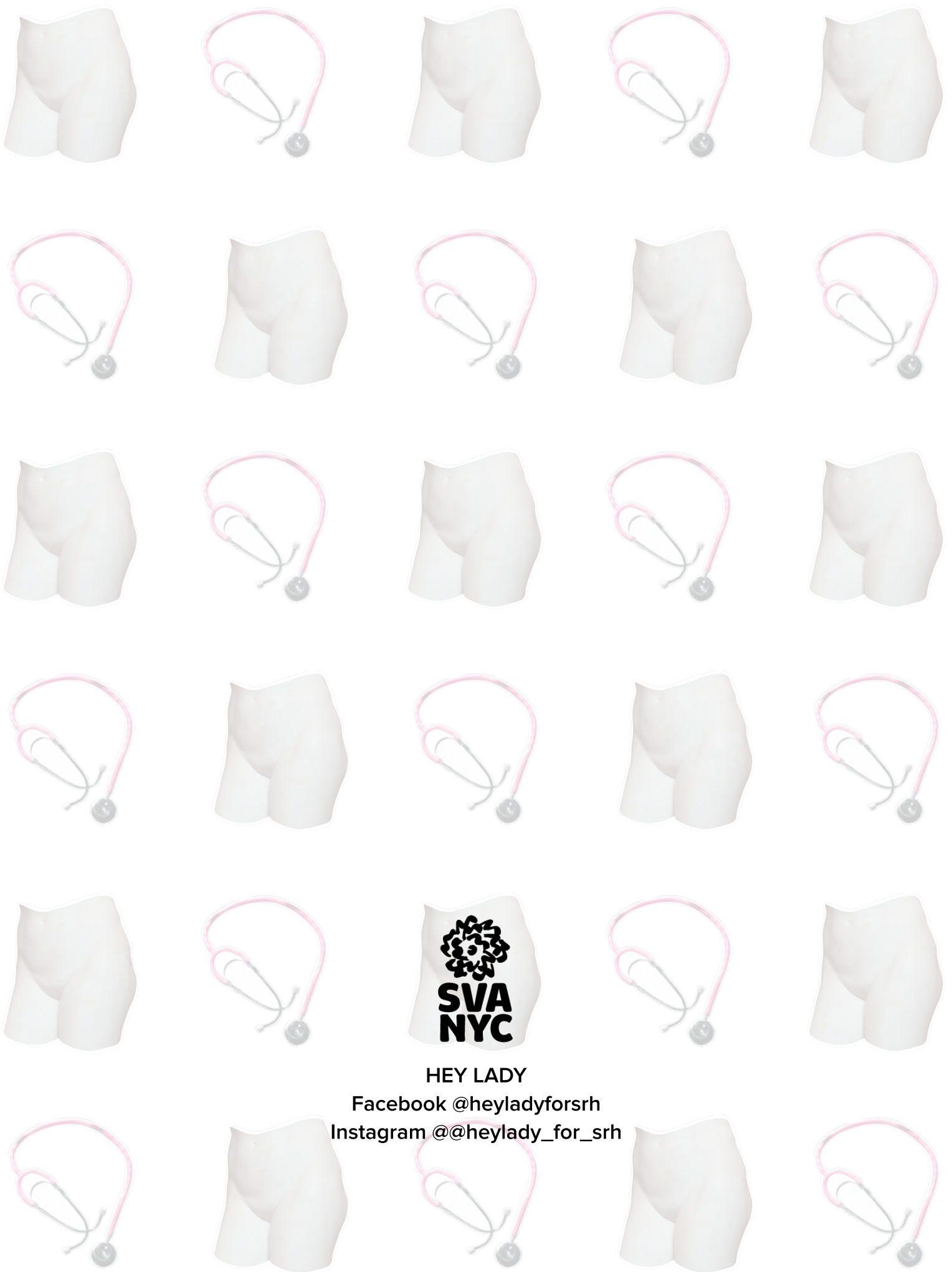
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