

# I am not a virus

## Breaking Silences in the Model Minority

*Asian American and International Student Mental Health  
Before and During COVID-19*

Ohio Program for Campus Safety and Mental Health (OPCSMH)  
North East Ohio Medical University (NEOMED)  
Rootstown, OH  
May 18, 2021

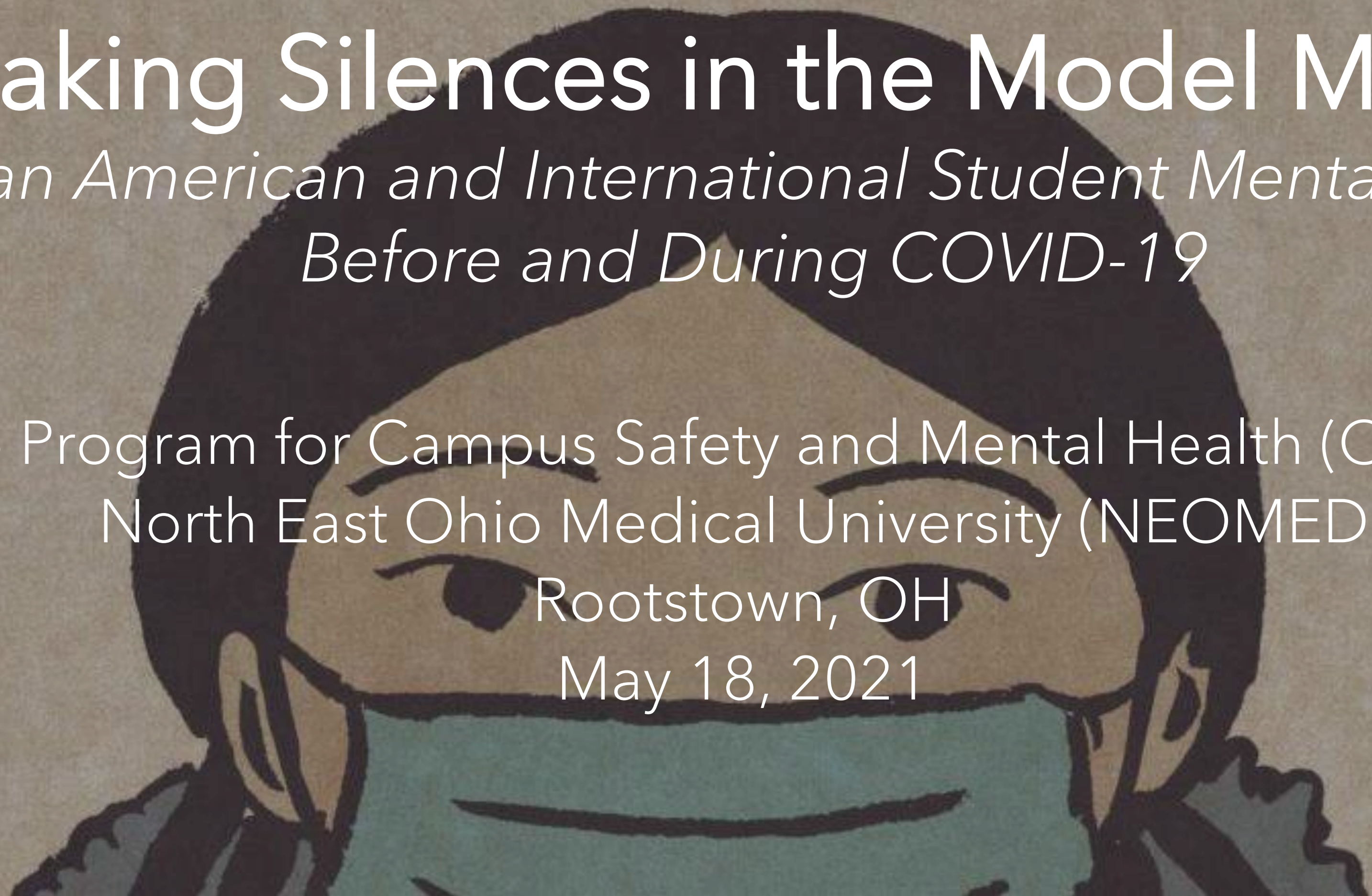
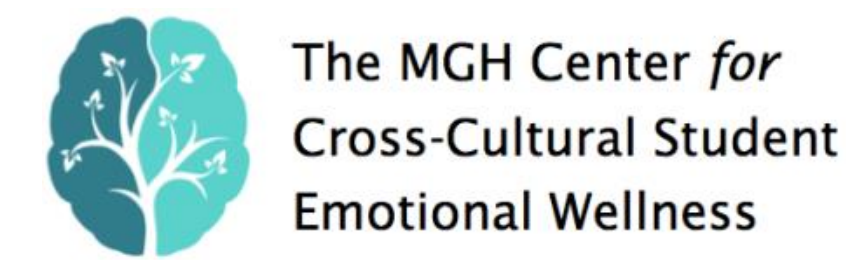


Illustration: Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom 정울림

Justin A. Chen, MD, MPH



# Financial disclosures

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- ❖ I am the Executive Director and Co-Founder of the MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness, a nonprofit volunteer organization (unpaid position)
- ❖ I do not have any commercial interests, financial relationships, or conflicts of interest relevant to this presentation



# Personal disclosures

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- ❖ Child of Taiwanese immigrant “tiger parents” (2<sup>nd</sup>-generation)
- ❖ Experienced many of these challenges myself growing up

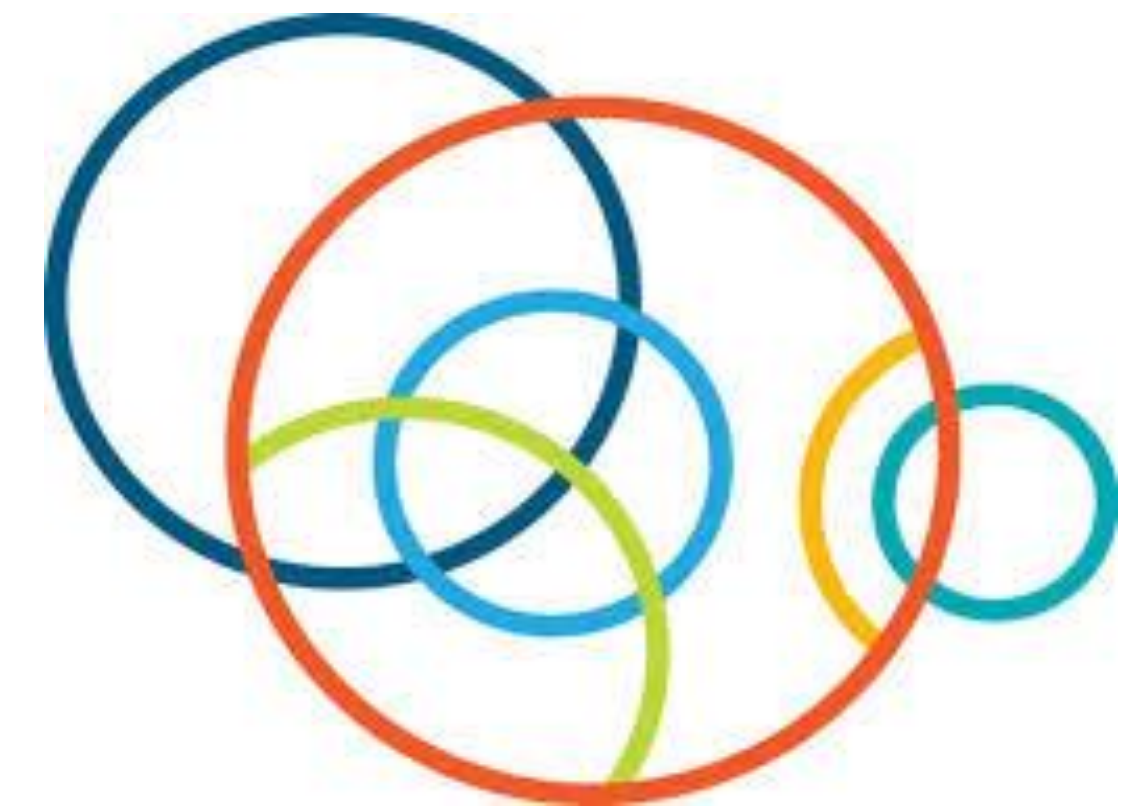


# Disclaimers

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- ❖ Asia is the largest continent on earth comprising nearly 50 countries and languages
- ❖ Culture and identity are multidimensional
- ❖ Many layers: acculturation, socioeconomic status, religion, language, sexuality, etc.

**THERE IS NO SUCH THING  
AS A SINGLE-ISSUE  
STRUGGLE BECAUSE  
WE DO NOT LIVE  
SINGLE-ISSUE LIVES.  
- AUDRE LORDE**



# Agenda

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1. Asian American and international student mental health
2. COVID-19
3. An innovative approach for engaging psychiatrically underserved populations



# Agenda

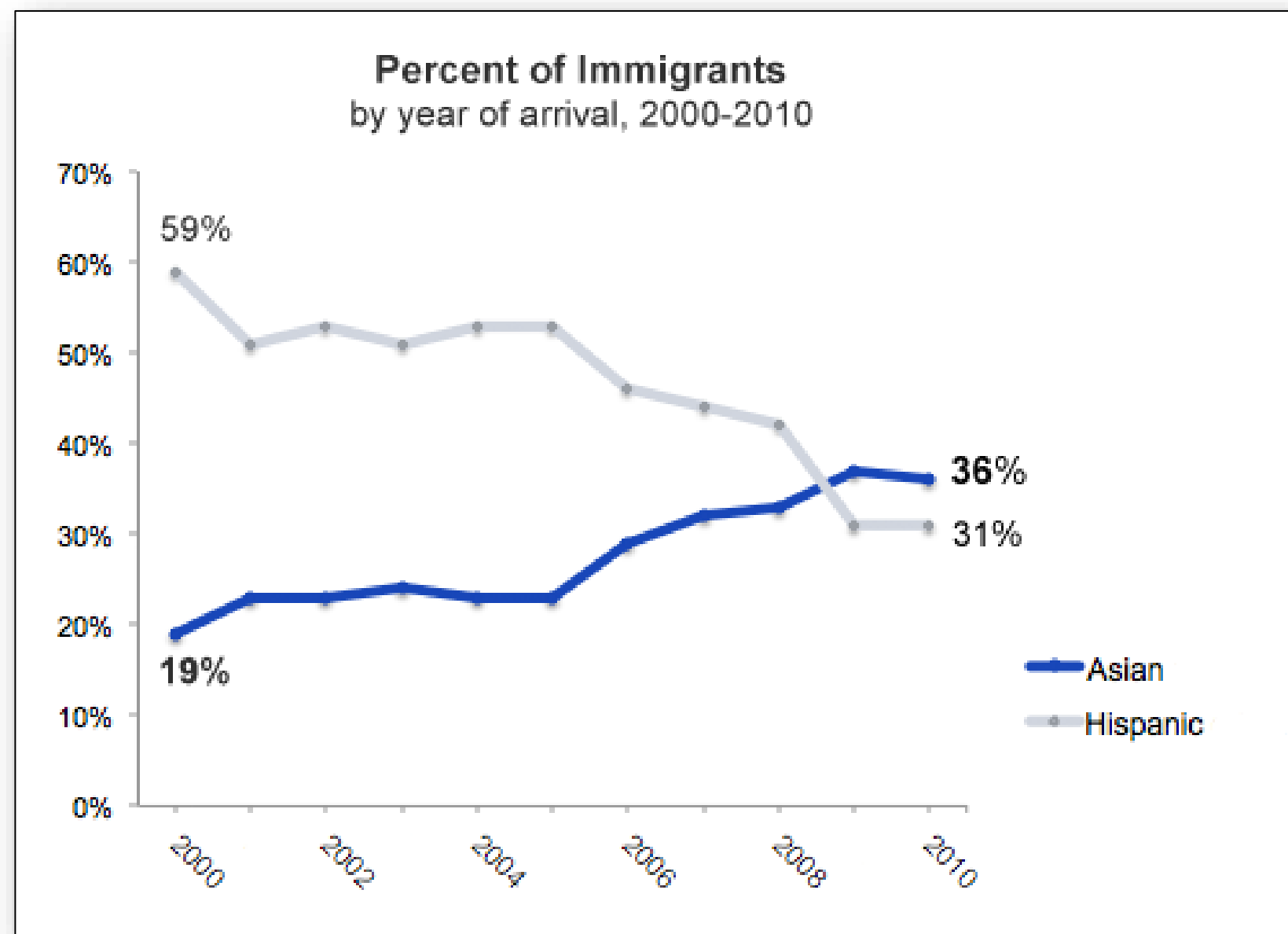
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1. Asian American and international student mental health
2. COVID-19
3. An innovative approach for engaging psychiatrically underserved populations



# Asian American population is surging

- ❖ Fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in U.S.
- ❖ Immigration > childbirth



# What is a model minority?

- ❖ "A demographic group whose members are perceived to achieve a higher degree of socioeconomic success than the population average."
- ❖ Stereotypical characteristics:
  - ✓ Hard work ethic
  - ✓ Commitment to education
  - ✓ Family stability
  - ✓ Selective assimilation
  - ✓ Low political and media profile ("don't rock the boat")



# The silent struggles of a “model” group

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- ❖ Hides significant heterogeneity of specific subpopulations
- ❖ Misleads policymakers to overlook issues
- ❖ Divisive contrast set up with other minorities
- ❖ Model minority stereotype shapes Asian students' intellectual identity and expected performance
- ❖ Inhibits disclosure of problems and help-seeking
- ❖ Contributes to anxiety about academic achievement

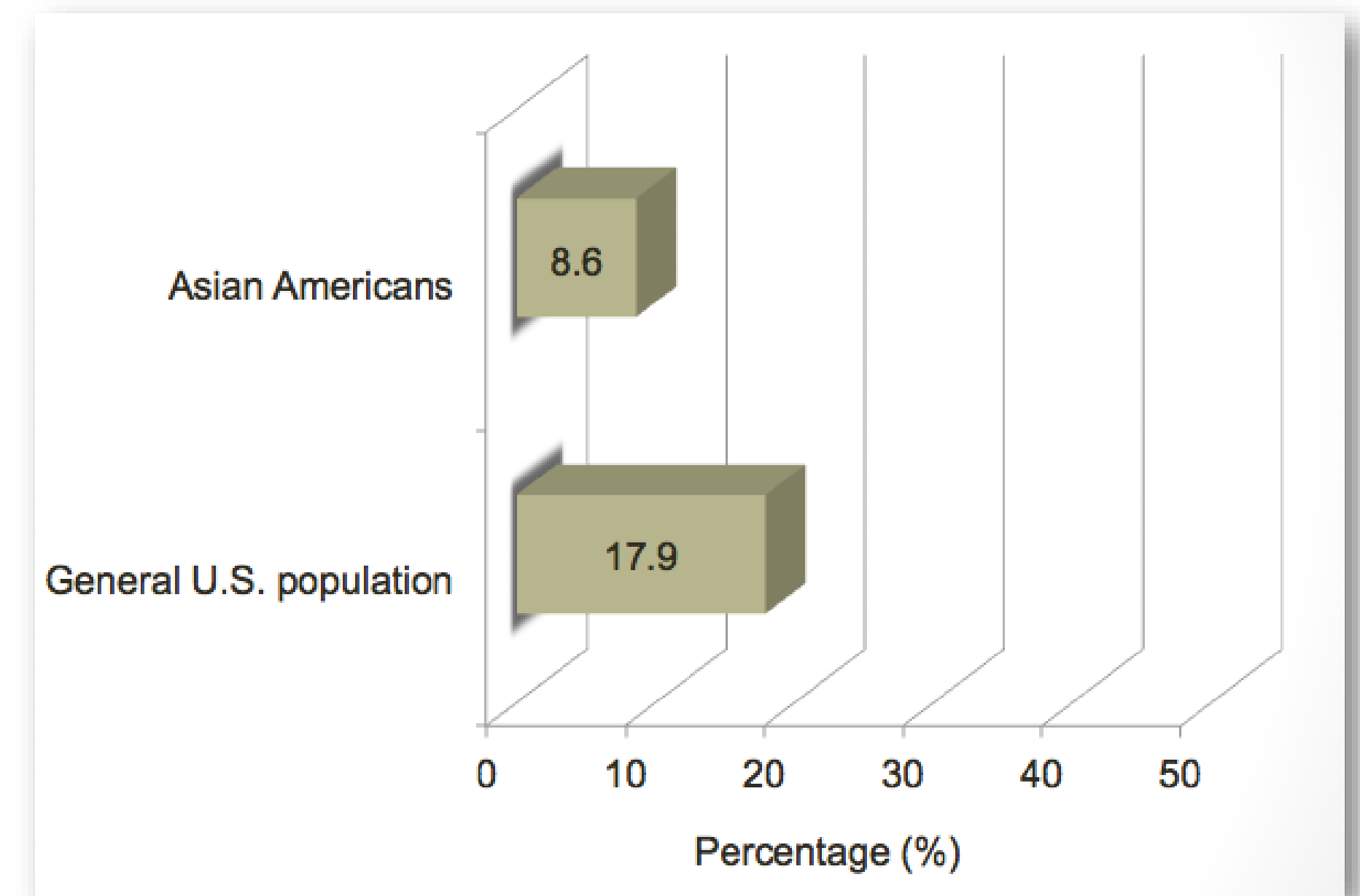


# The model minority in crisis



# Mental health disparities

- ❖ Asian Americans much less likely to seek mental health treatment
- ❖ More likely to rate psychiatric services as unhelpful



## Use of Mental Health–Related Services Among Immigrant and US-Born Asian Americans: Results From the National Latino and Asian American Study

Jennifer Abe-Kim, PhD, David T. Takeuchi, PhD, Seunghye Hong, MA, Nolan Zane, PhD, Stanley Sue, PhD, Michael S. Spencer, PhD, Hoa Appel, PhD, Ethel Nicdao, PhD, and Margarita Alegría, PhD

# Mental health disparities

TABLE 3. Unadjusted odds of reporting psychiatric symptoms and diagnoses in the past 12 months among college students from racial-ethnic minority groups<sup>a</sup>

Symptom and diagnosis	Hispanic		Black		Asian/Pacific Islander		AI/NA/NH <sup>b</sup>		Multiracial	
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
<b>Symptom</b>										
Ever felt things were hopeless	1.17**	1.09–1.25	1.04	.94–1.14	1.30**	1.22–1.39	.86	.65–1.13	1.37**	1.28–1.46
Ever felt overwhelmed by all you had to do	.69**	.63–.77	.58**	.51–.66	.52**	.48–.57	.45**	.32–.62	.98	.89–1.09
Ever felt exhausted (not from physical activity)	.72**	.66–.79	.66**	.59–.74	.65**	.60–.70	.53**	.39–.73	1.14**	1.04–1.25
Ever felt very lonely	.80**	.74–.86	.86**	.78–.95	.97	.91–1.04	.58**	.44–.76	1.24**	1.16–1.33
Ever felt very sad	.86**	.80–.92	.82**	.75–.91	.91**	.85–.98	.65**	.49–.86	1.27**	1.19–1.37
Ever felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	1.05	.97–1.13	.99	.89–1.09	1.21**	1.13–1.29	.82	.61–1.10	1.38**	1.29–1.47
Ever felt overwhelming anxiety	.84**	.79–.91	.71**	.64–.78	.81**	.76–.87	.74*	.56–.98	1.13**	1.06–1.20
Ever felt overwhelming anger	1.14**	1.06–1.22	1.16**	1.05–1.28	1.12**	1.05–1.20	1.04	.78–1.37	1.41**	1.32–1.50
Ever intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured yourself	.78**	.67–.90	.58**	.46–.73	.87*	.76–.99	.96	.56–1.64	1.21*	1.08–1.36
Ever seriously considered suicide	.91†	.80–1.03	.96	.81–1.14	1.10†	.99–1.23	1.14	.73–1.77	1.37**	1.24–1.51
Ever attempted suicide	1.31†	.92–1.74	1.37†	.94–2.00	1.38*	1.07–1.78	2.24†	.97–5.15	1.68**	1.33–2.12
<b>Diagnosis</b>										
Depression only	.72**	.58–.88	.67**	.50–.90	.60**	.49–.73	1.00	.48–2.09	1.05	.89–1.25
Anxiety only	.57**	.48–.67	.43**	.33–.56	.34**	.28–.41	.91	.52–1.59	.87*	.76–1.00
Depression and anxiety	.48**	.41–.55	.36**	.29–.45	.36**	.32–.42	.76	.47–1.23	.92†	.83–1.02
Other	.57**	.48–.68	.61**	.48–.78	.50**	.42–.59	1.25	.74–2.11	1.02	.89–1.17

<sup>a</sup> Results are from the spring 2015 American College Health Association–National College Health Assessment IIB. Whites are the reference group.

<sup>b</sup> AI/NA/NH, American Indian/Native Alaskan/Native Hawaiian.

\*p<.01, \*\*p<.001.

# Research disparities

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- ❖ “The most understudied racial/ethnic group in the peer-reviewed literature”
- ❖ Significant underfunding by NIH
- ❖ Often excluded as a category; Lack of disaggregated data

Original Investigation | Health Policy

## Trends in Clinical Research Including Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander Participants Funded by the US National Institutes of Health, 1992 to 2018

Lan N. Đoàn, MPH; Yumie Takata, PhD; Kari-Lyn K. Sakuma, PhD, MPH; Veronica L. Irvin, PhD, MPH



# Barriers to treatment



## Structural

- ❖ Cost, transportation, access
- ❖ Language mismatch
- ❖ Mental health interventions poorly adapted for diverse patients
- ❖ Provider/diagnostic/systemic bias

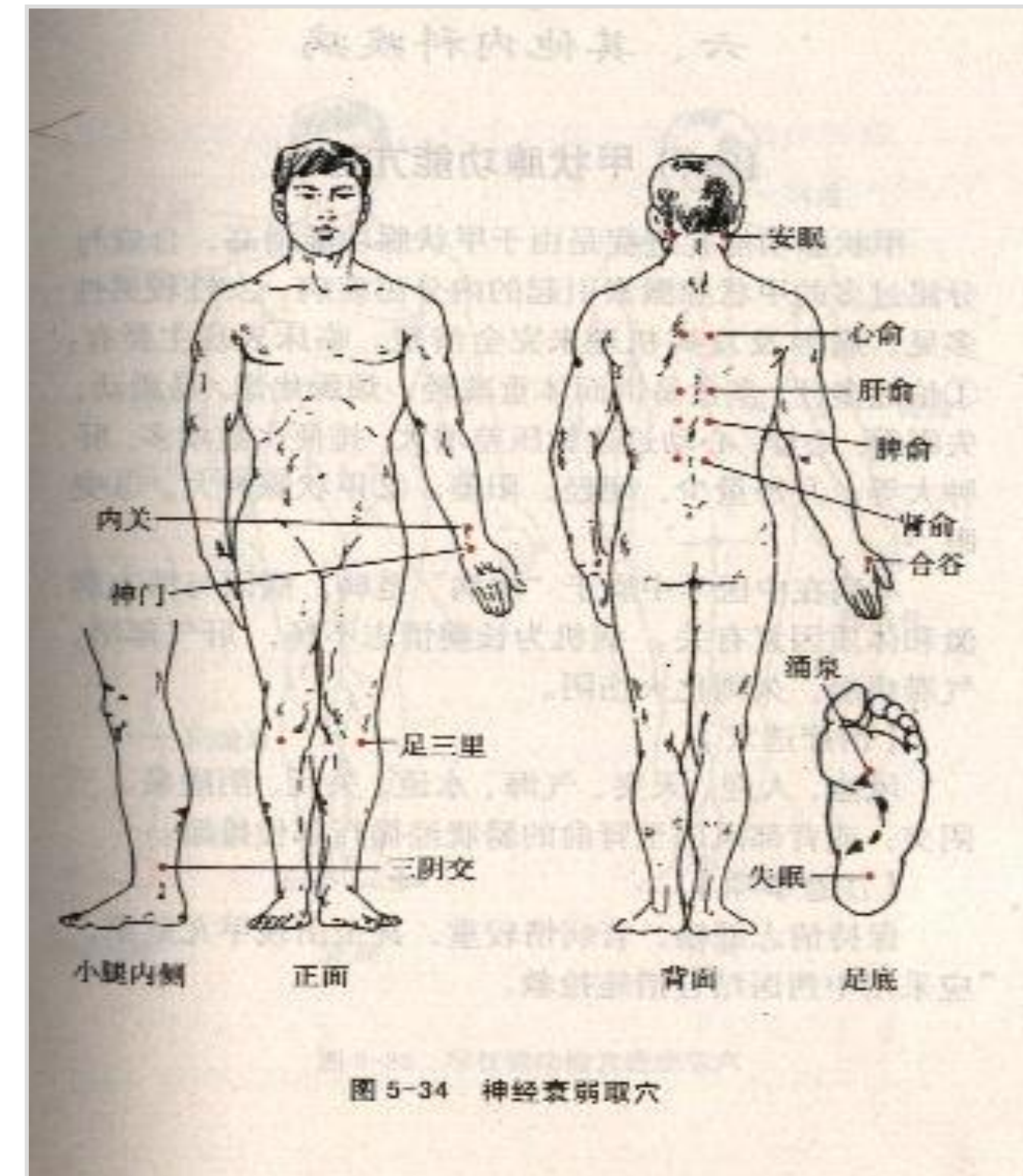
## Cultural

- ❖ Belief that depression and anxiety are personal weaknesses rather than illnesses
- ❖ Emotional inhibition rather than expression
- ❖ Traditional role of psychiatry; low awareness of services
- ❖ Communication breakdown
- ❖ Stigma/shame



# Culture and stigma

- ❖ Mental illness is highly stigmatized in Chinese culture (~ psychosis)
- ❖ Implications for marriage/kinship
- ❖ Neurasthenia (神经衰弱)
- ❖ Emphasis on somatic rather than psychological symptoms



*Cupping points for treating neurasthenia.*

# Face, shame, and suicide

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- ❖ “Face” (面子/臉) and “social death”
- ❖ “Men cannot live without shame. A sense of shame is the beginning of integrity.” – Mencius (孟子)
- ❖ Shame linked to suicide
- ❖ Suicide culturally more permitted?



## The Role of Stigma and Denormalization in Suicide-Prevention Laws in East Asia: A Sociocultural, Historical, and Ethical Perspective

Justin A. Chen, MD, MPH, Andrew Courtwright, MD, PhD,  
and Kevin Chien-Chang Wu, MD, LL.M, PhD



# Culture shapes illness beliefs and Tx preferences

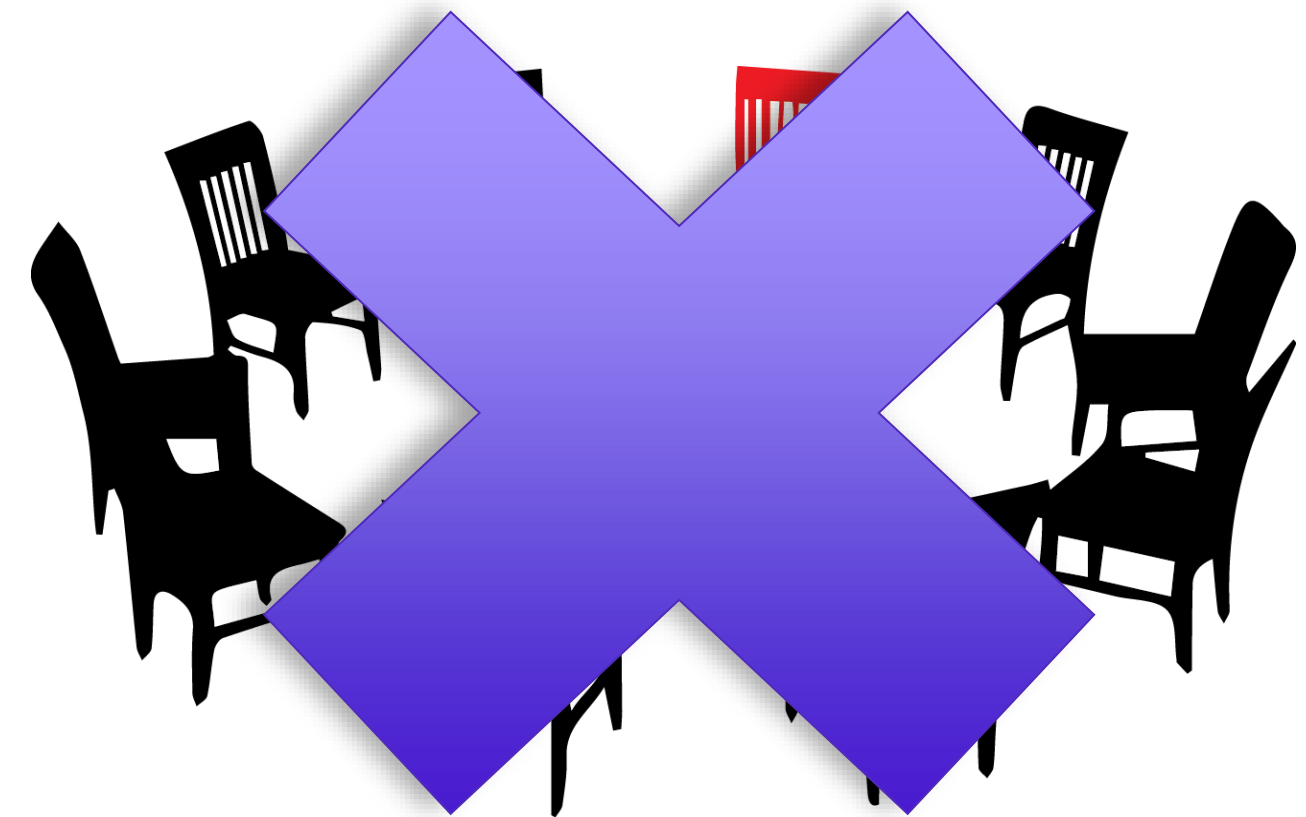
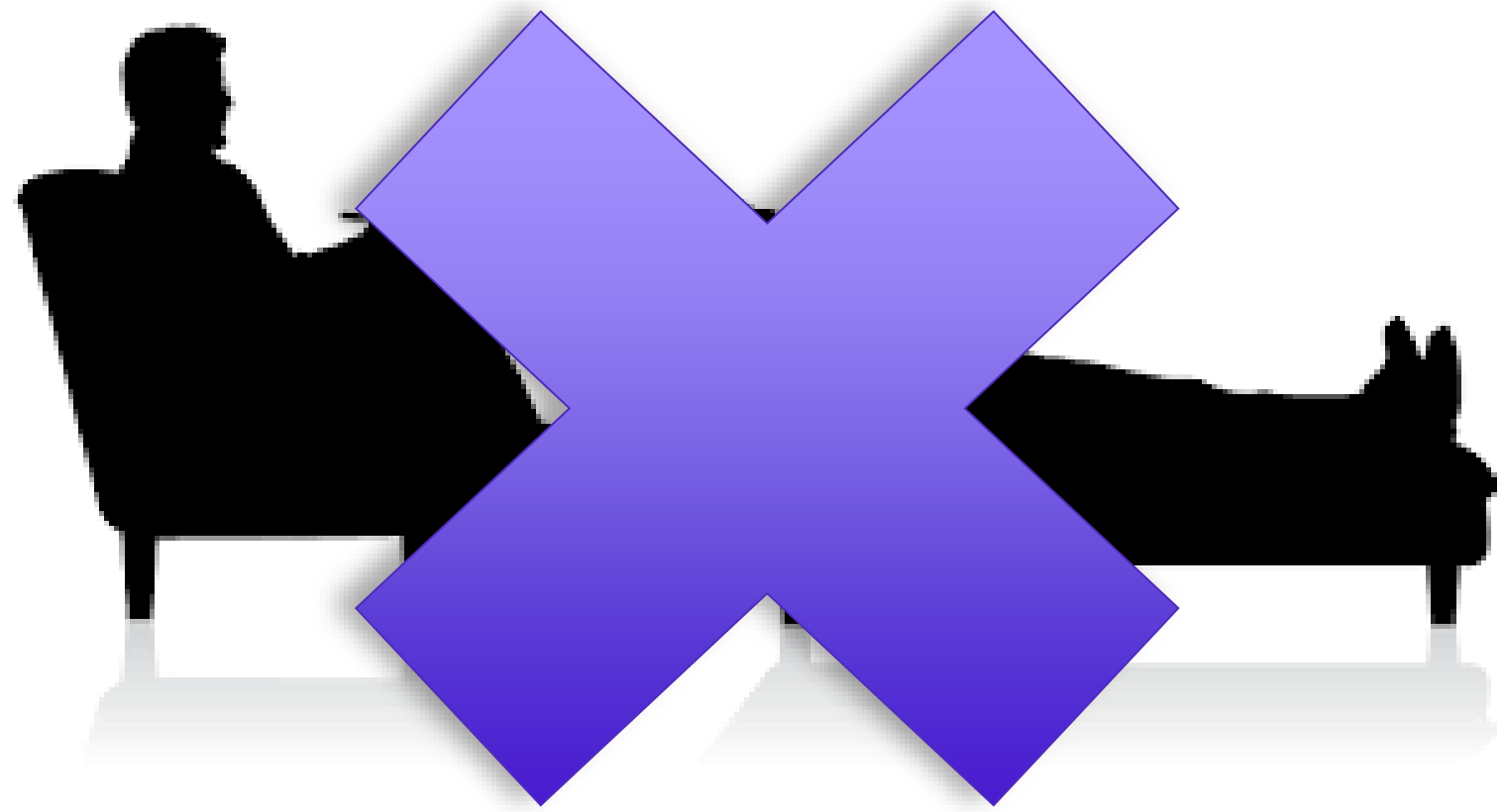
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- ❖ May not acknowledge depressed mood unless directly asked
- ❖ Likely to attribute to psychosocial or interpersonal problems
- ❖ Increasing acceptance of biomedical model of depression may paradoxically increase stigma





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# What we see clinically

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- ❖ Patients often in crisis when they first present
- ❖ Very difficult to engage in treatment
- ❖ Very difficult to find appropriate referrals
- ❖ Students vs. parents: mismatch in treatment goals



# Case: “I don’t believe in mental illness”

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- Teresa is an 18-y/o Chinese American woman who shares her parents’ high standards and perfectionistic thinking style
- She began to struggle with anxiety and depression during high school. However, she and her parents were skeptical of mental illness and did not seek treatment. Despite her symptoms, she continued to excel academically.
- The summer before freshman year at an elite university, her anxiety became so paralyzing that she could not complete basic tasks.
- She became increasingly isolated, spending most of her time in her room watching movies or surfing the web.
- Her suicidal thoughts increased, and her parents brought her to a psychiatrist for evaluation.



# Cross-cultural psychological challenges

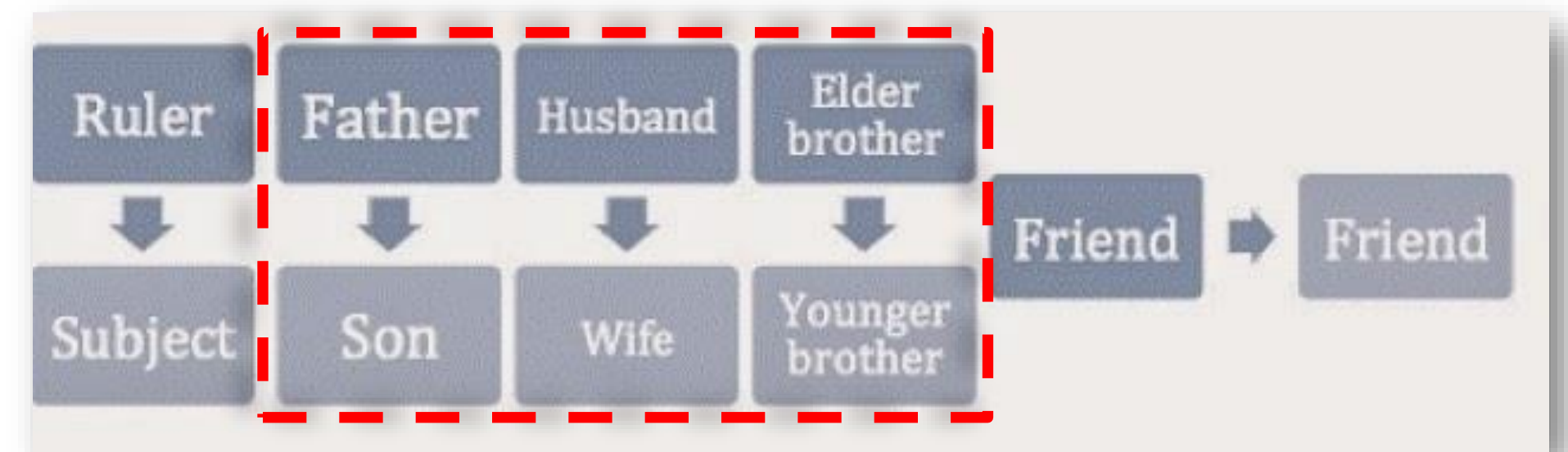
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1. Separation from parents
2. Face and shame
3. Identity formation
4. Culture clash



# Traditional Asian family hierarchy

“In the traditional Asian family, parents define the law and the children are expected to abide by their requests and demands; filial piety or respect for one’s parents and elders is critically important.”



# Culture clash

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“Pursuing one’s passion... **How American.**”



# AAPI young women

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Race Soc Probl (2014) 6:56–68  
DOI 10.1007/s12552-014-9115-4

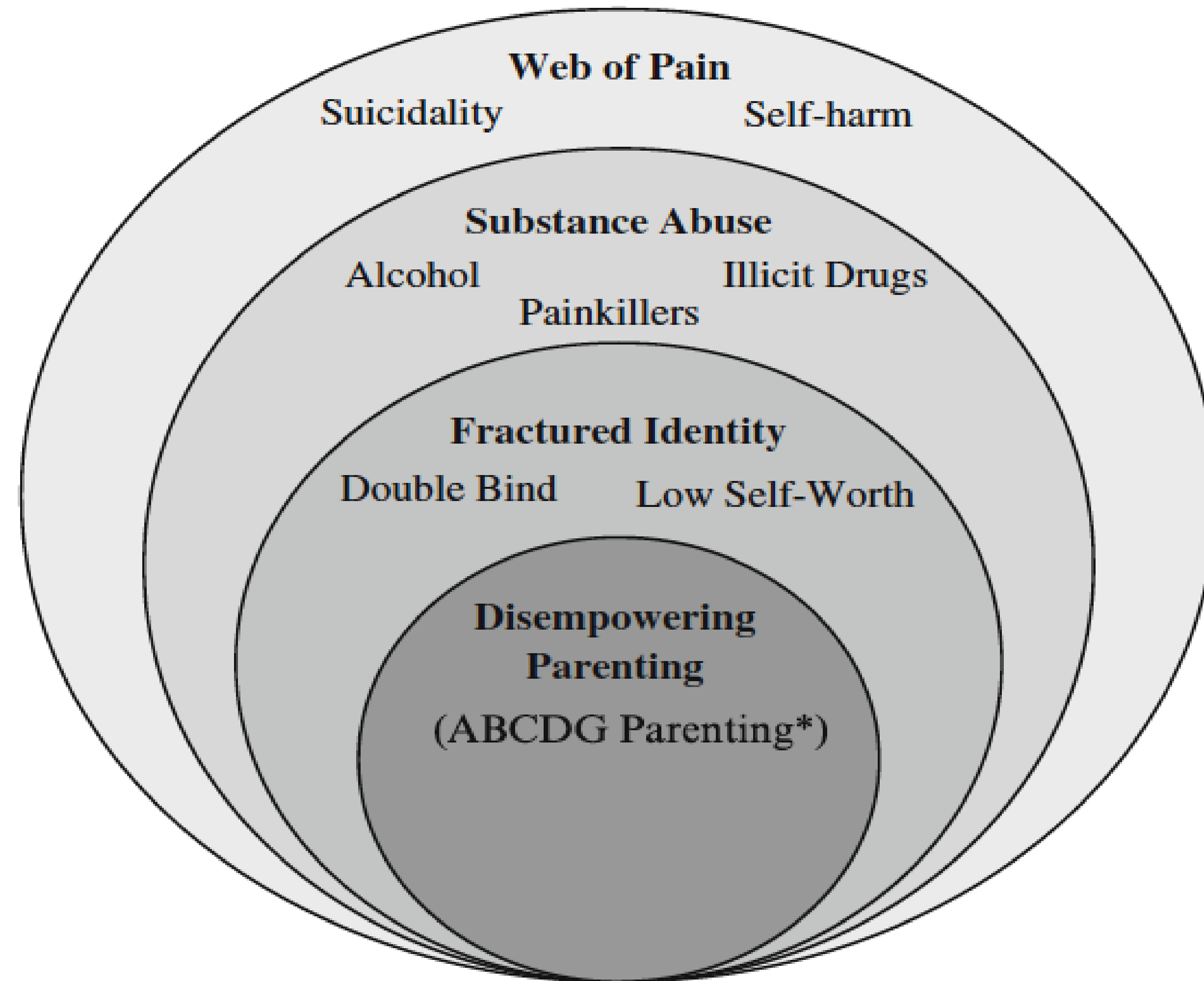
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## **Fractured Identity: A Framework for Understanding Young Asian American Women's Self-harm and Suicidal Behaviors**

**Hyeouk Chris Hahm · Judith G. Gonyea ·  
Christine Chiao · Luca Anna Koritsanszky**



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**Fig. 1** Fractured identity model \*ABCDG parenting: *A* abusive parenting, *B* burdening parenting, *C* culturally disjointed parenting, *D* disengaging parenting, *G* gender-prescribed parenting

# Case: "I live for my parents"

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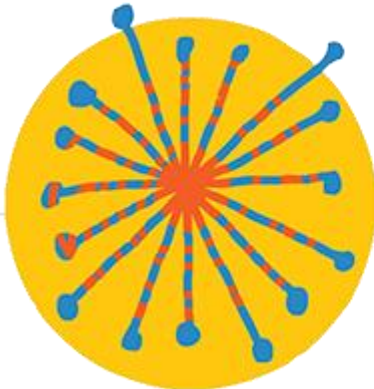
- Pamela is the 45-y/o daughter of Chinese immigrants and a successful professional with a high-paying job, referred to therapy by her younger sister because she feels stuck and unmotivated.
- She reveals she is living at home with her parents which is a major source of stress. While they are happy with her career achievements, they (and particularly mother) disapprove of everyone she has ever dated, and blame her for being single.
- Despite this conflict, she believes she is one of the only things that makes them happy, and is terrified of moving out of the house, even though she acknowledges it would be better for her identity and mental health.
- She experiences rageful thoughts directed toward her father and chronic passive SI.



# AAPI student mental health awareness



"Looking for Luke" Trailer



The Clay Center for Young Healthy Minds

*Shining light on mental health through education.*



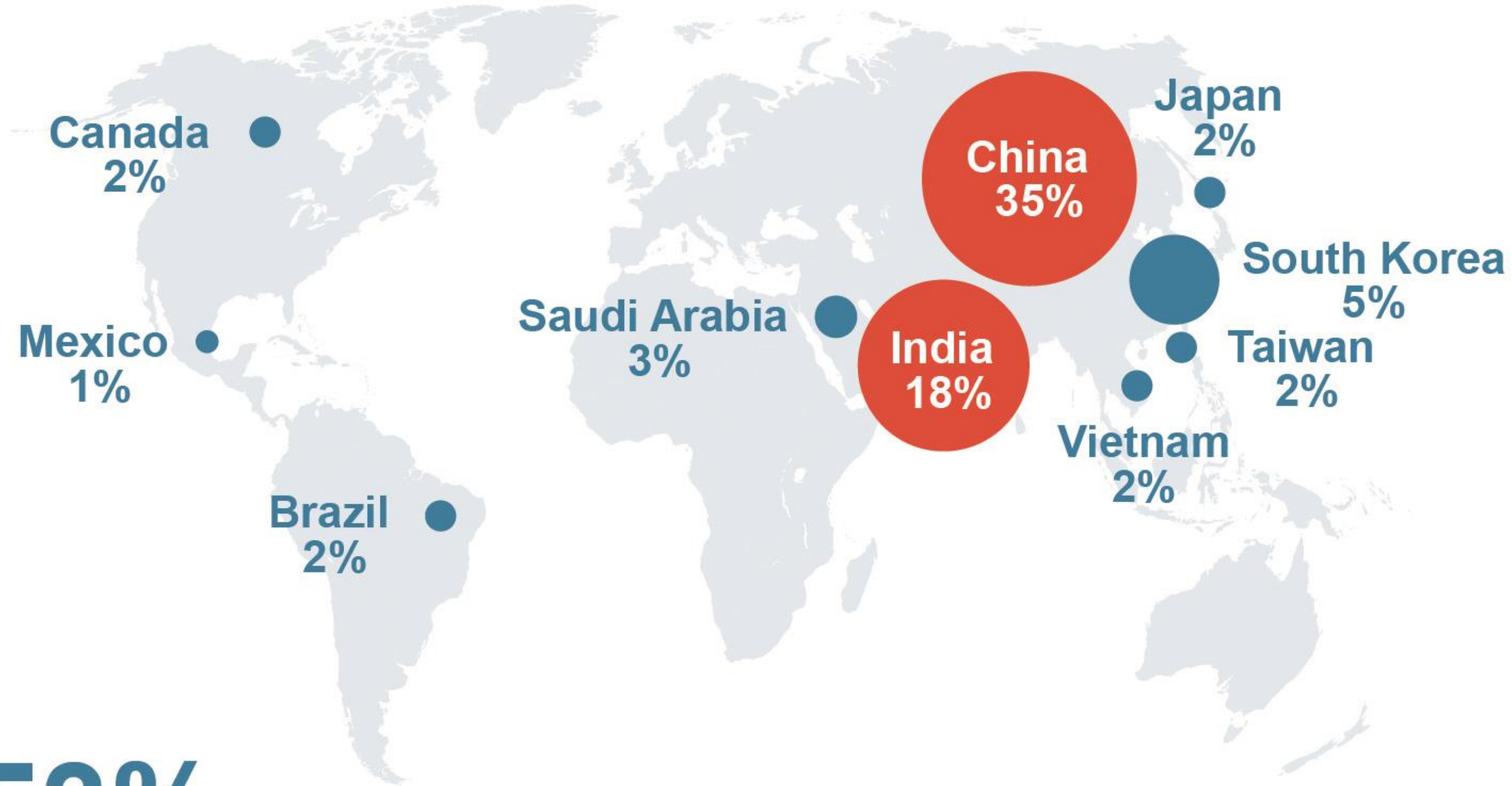
4,951 views

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qipDNvyHn-8>



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## TOP 10 PLACES OF ORIGIN FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



**53%** of international students came from China and India.

**Source:** The *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange* is a comprehensive information resource on international students in the United States and U.S. students studying abroad. It is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government and is published by IIE. For more information, visit [www.opendoorsdata.org](http://www.opendoorsdata.org).

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Opinion | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER

## Chinese, Studying in America, and Struggling

[查看简体中文版](#) | [查看繁體中文版](#)

By HELEN GAO DEC. 12, 2017



Matt Chase



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EDUCATION

# ALIENATION 101

There were hopes that the flood of Chinese students into America would bring the countries closer. But a week at the University of Iowa suggested to Brook Larmer that the opposite may have happened

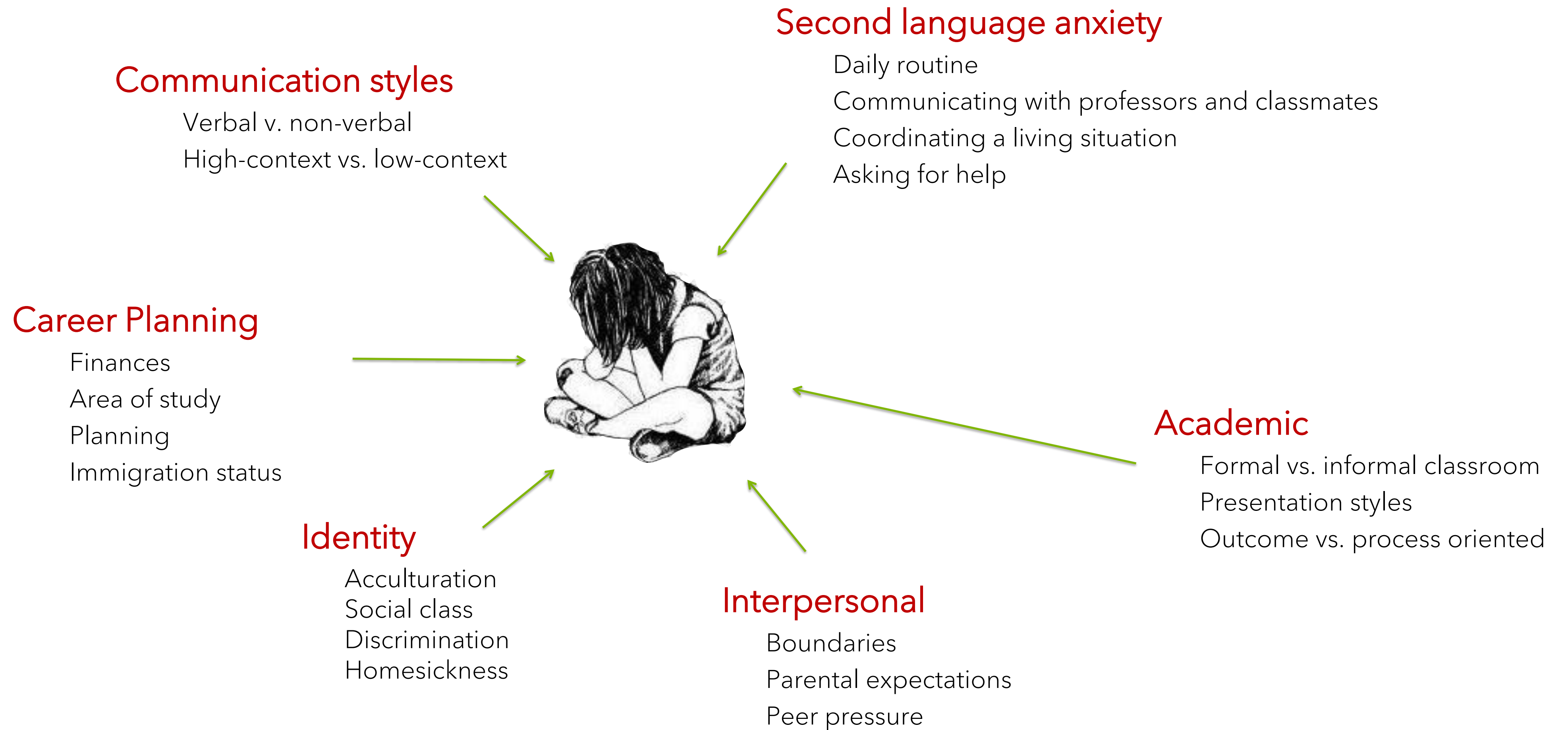
BROOK LARMER | APRIL/MAY 2017



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# Common issues

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# International student mental health (pre-COVID-19)

Table 2. International student status correlates of mental health diagnoses and symptoms of ACHA-NCHA IIC, Spring 2017.

	International	
	OR	95% CI
<b>Mental health diagnoses</b>		
Depression diagnosis	0.84	0.66–1.06
Anxiety diagnosis	0.47***	0.38–0.58
Depression and anxiety diagnosis	0.58***	0.50–0.67
Other diagnosis	0.72**	0.59–0.87
<b>Mental health symptoms</b>		
Ever felt so depressed that it was difficult to function	1.10*	1.01–1.19
Ever felt overwhelming anxiety	0.69***	0.63–0.74
Ever intentionally cut, burned, bruised, or otherwise injured yourself	0.96	0.83–1.12
Ever seriously considered suicide	0.83**	0.72–0.95
Ever attempted suicide	1.37*	1.04–1.82

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



Tat Shing Yeung, PhD



"STUNNING" - PASTE

"A FASCINATING GLIMPSE INTO THE LIVES OF AN EXPANDING POPULATION OF IMMIGRANT STUDENTS" - THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

# MAINLAND

A FILM BY MIAO WANG

ABRAMORAMA PRESENTS A THREE WATERS PRODUCTIONS FILM "MAINLAND" FEATURING STELLA XINYI ZHU HARRY JUNRU HE  
ORIGINAL SCORE BY STEPHEN ULRICH EDITOR MIAO WANG DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY SEAN PRICE WILLIAMS  
PRODUCED BY MIAO WANG VIOLET DU FENG DAMON G. SMITH DIRECTED BY MIAO WANG

THREE WATERS PRODUCTIONS



MAINLANDFILM

MAINLANDFILM.COM

THREEWATERSFILMS



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# Differences in presentation

- ❖ May not acknowledge depressed mood
- ❖ Increased somatic complaints (disruption in sleep and appetite, stomachaches, headaches, dizziness)
- ❖ Avoidance, procrastination, academic decline
- ❖ Cross-cultural bridge: "Stress" (压力)



## The SWEET Life: Improving Treatment Engagement and Emotional Wellness in Diverse Clinical Populations

The increasing diversity of the U.S. population poses a challenge for mental health clinicians. Culture affects nearly every aspect of psychiatric service engagement due to its profound influence on illness beliefs, treatment-seeking behavior, and stigma. Disparities in both psychiatric service utilization and outcomes therefore continue to disproportionately affect individuals who are not in the dominant Caucasian, English-speaking, native-born group.



# Common mental health myths

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Counseling is for crazy people.

Everyone will know I saw a counselor.

Only someone from my home country will understand my problem.

I can handle my own mental health problems. If I can't, that means I'm weak.

I could lose my visa status.



# Agenda

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1. Asian American and international student mental health
2. COVID-19
3. An innovative approach for engaging psychiatrically underserved populations



# Woman wearing face mask attacked in possible coronavirus

hat

By Anabel

## 'NO CHINESE ALLOWED' Coronavirus fuels racist backlash with calls to 'nuke' China and shops banning Chinese customers over killer bug

Felix Allen

30 Jan 2020, 10:19



The S n p r 89.7 WGBH Boston's Local NPR

Leaks, Taps, Bathrooms Blocked Drains Outbreak

NEWS ARTS & LIFE MUSIC SHOWS & PODCASTS SEARCH

s > Crime

Chinese student attacked in S

## Politicians' Use of 'Wuhan Virus' Starts a Debate Health Experts Wanted to

ads Like A Virus

+ PLAYLIST



## 'Ching chong! You have Chinese virus!': 1 in 4 Asian American youths experience racist bullying, report says

A group of high school students interviewed nearly 1,000 young Asian Americans to explore how youths are dealing with the pandemic-fueled rise in racism.



## in 2020

As an Asian-American, I've been conditioned to a certain kind of unspoken racism. This pandemic has unmasked how vicious it really is.

New York Times

Berlin-Moabit

Chinesin (23) von zwei beleidigt, bespuckt un

## Texas m family

By Danielle Wallace | Fox News

Search

# The Guardian

Calla Wahlquist and Australian Associated Press

@callapilla

Wed 26 Feb 2020 21:13 EST



373

## Doctors and nurses at Me hospital racially abused o coronavirus panic

Parents at the Royal Children's hospital have ref and nurses of 'Asian appearance' treat their child

Coronavirus crisis - live updates

## Assaulted in es Accused virus

edly taken to the emergency

the term to rmation, a ich for The



Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

# 8 Dead in Atlanta Spa Shootings, With Fears of Anti-Asian Bias

Last Updated March 26, 2021, 9:19 a.m. ET

The man who police say went on a rampage at three spas in the Atlanta area has been charged with eight counts of murder in connection with the attacks.





Anti-Asian hate crimes increased by nearly 150% during the pandemic, even as overall hate crimes dropped by 7% in the same period.

### 9/17/20 Report: Rising Racism Against Asian-American & Pacific Islander (AAPI) Youth

341 of 2500 self-reported hate incidents involved AAPI youth nationally (16%)

- 24 (7%) involved physical assault
- Although adults were present in 48% of the cases, bystanders intervened in only 10%

***/// The constant feeling that I must have a heightened awareness of my surroundings whenever my family and I go outside made me feel vulnerable. ///***

**– Cassie Eng, Youth Campaign intern**



“I think people are acting out their frustrations and their racism and their stereotypes and prejudices, [and] that the floodgates are lifted when situations like this arise.”

**Dr. Paul Watanabe**

*Professor of Political Science*

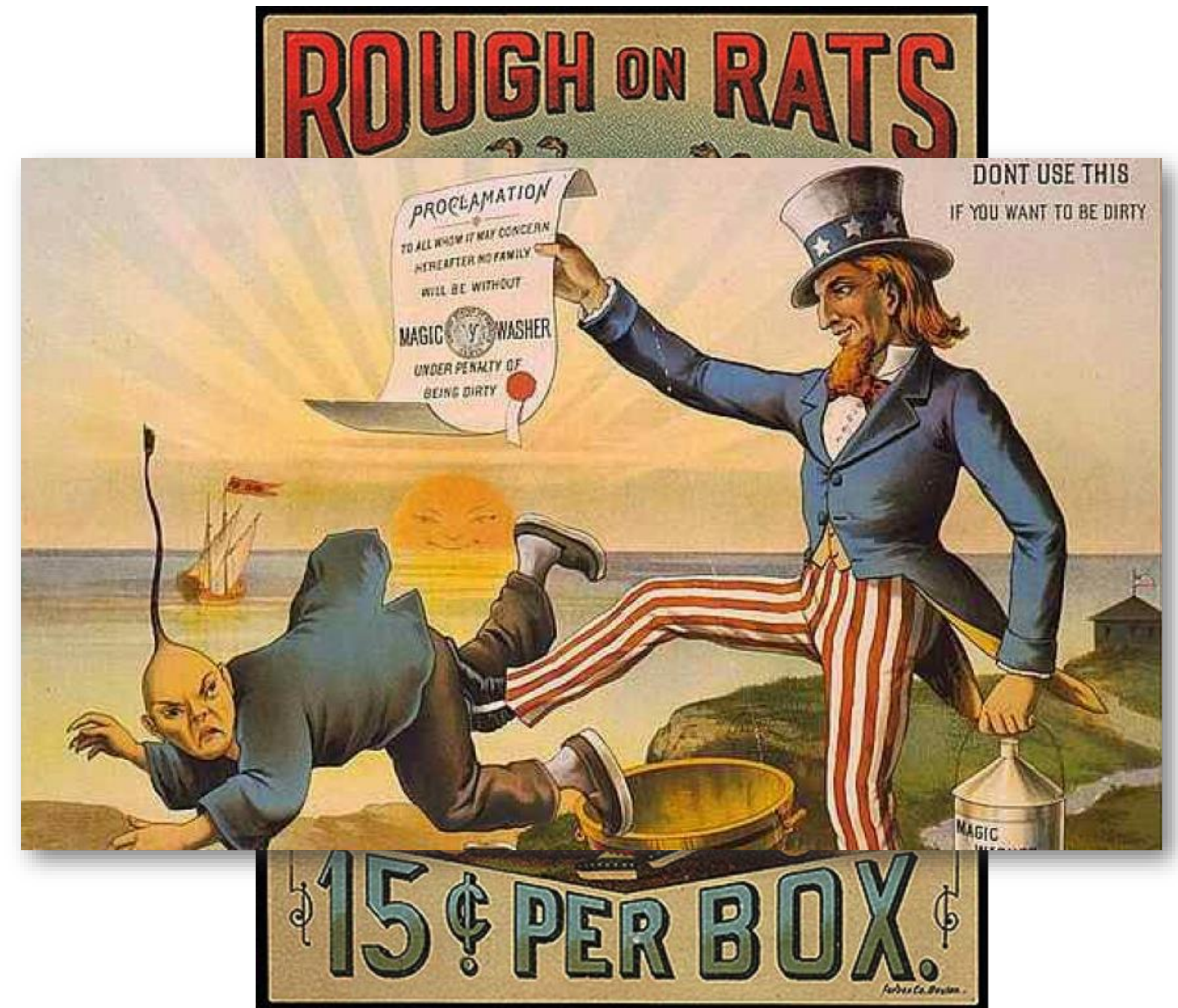
*Director, Institute for Asian American Studies*

*University of Massachusetts-Boston*



# Long history of anti-Asian discrimination in US

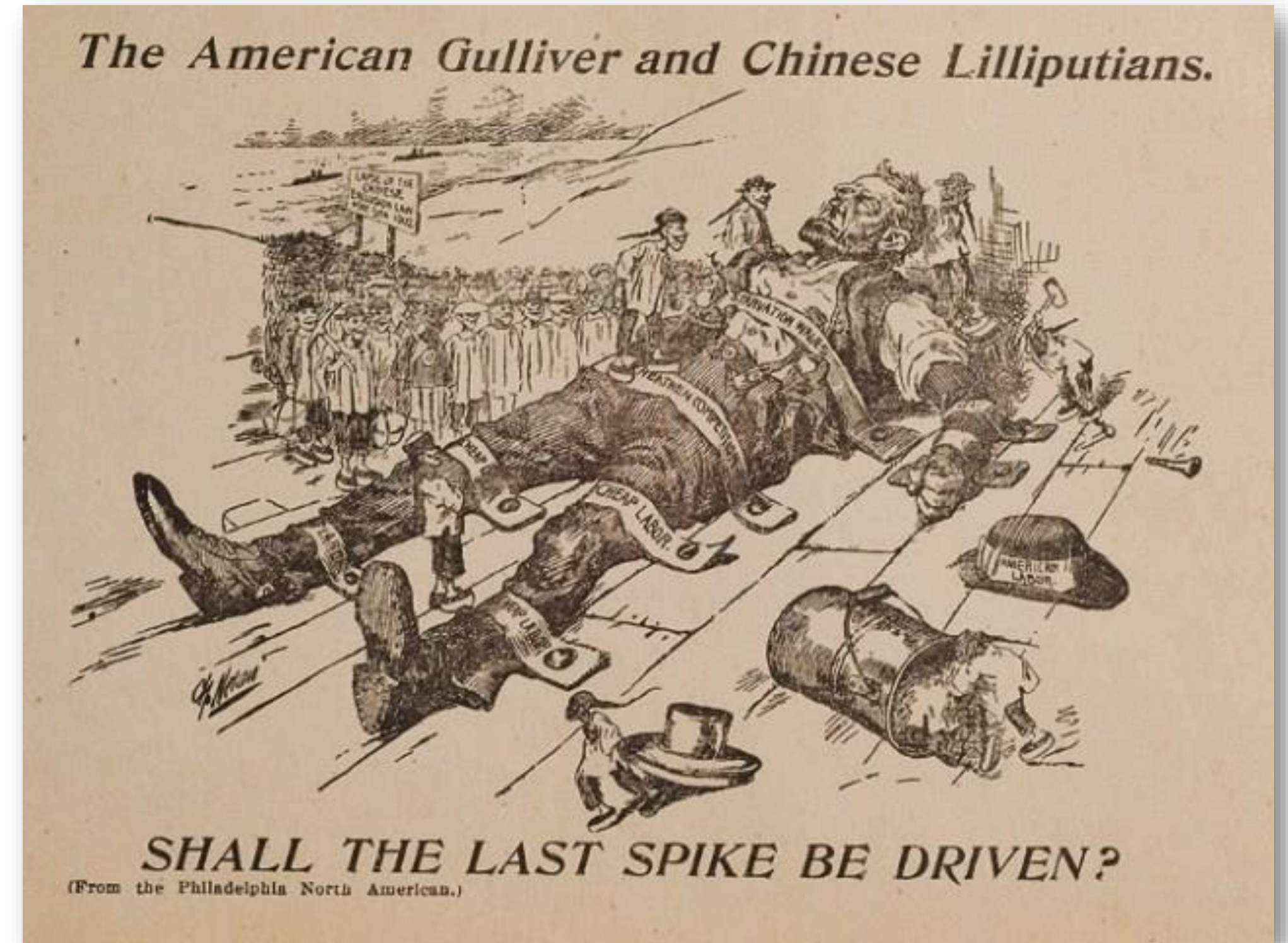
- ❖ “Uncivilized, unclean, filthy beyond all conception.” (*New York Daily Tribune*, 1854)
- ❖ Associated with vice and disease
- ❖ “Yellow Peril”
- ❖ Asian immigration restrictions:
  - Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)
  - Immigration Act (1917)
  - Johnson-Reed Act (1924)



# Yellow Peril stereotype



*The Wasp*, March 1882

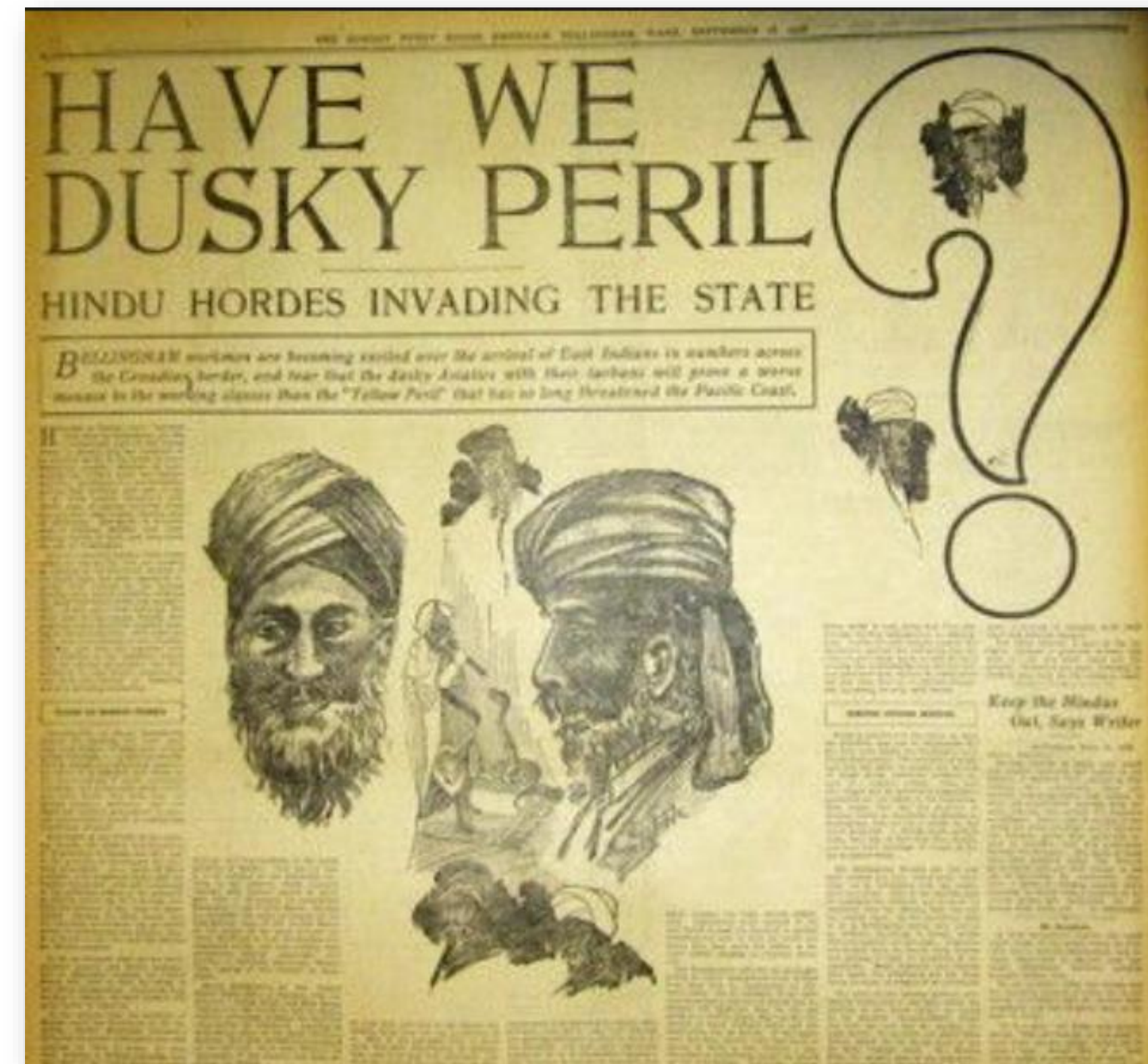


American Federation of Labor, 1902

# Fear + xenophobia extends to other groups



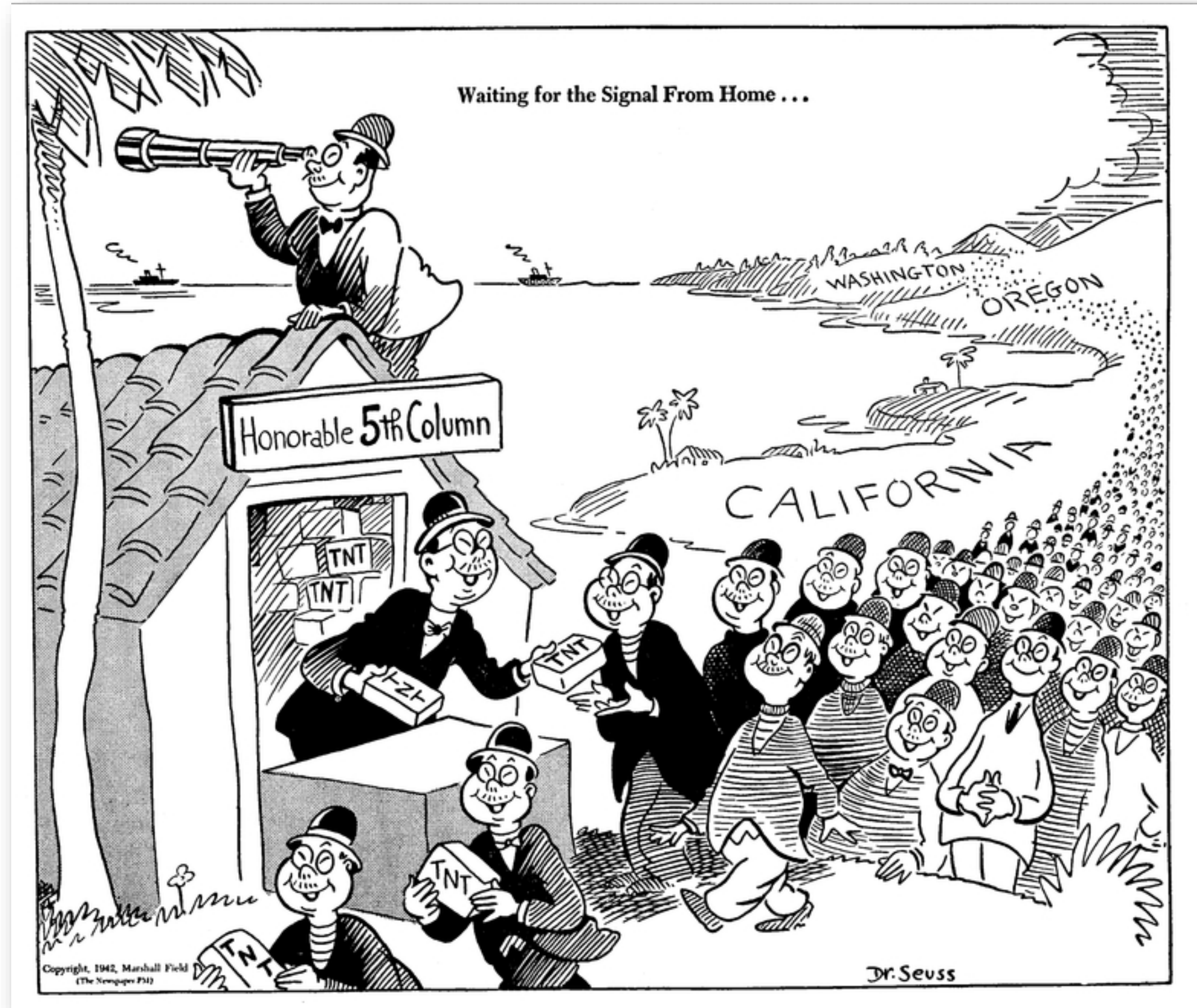
San Francisco flyer, 1906



Puget Sound American, 1906



# Perpetual foreigner stereotype



Dr. Seuss, February 1942

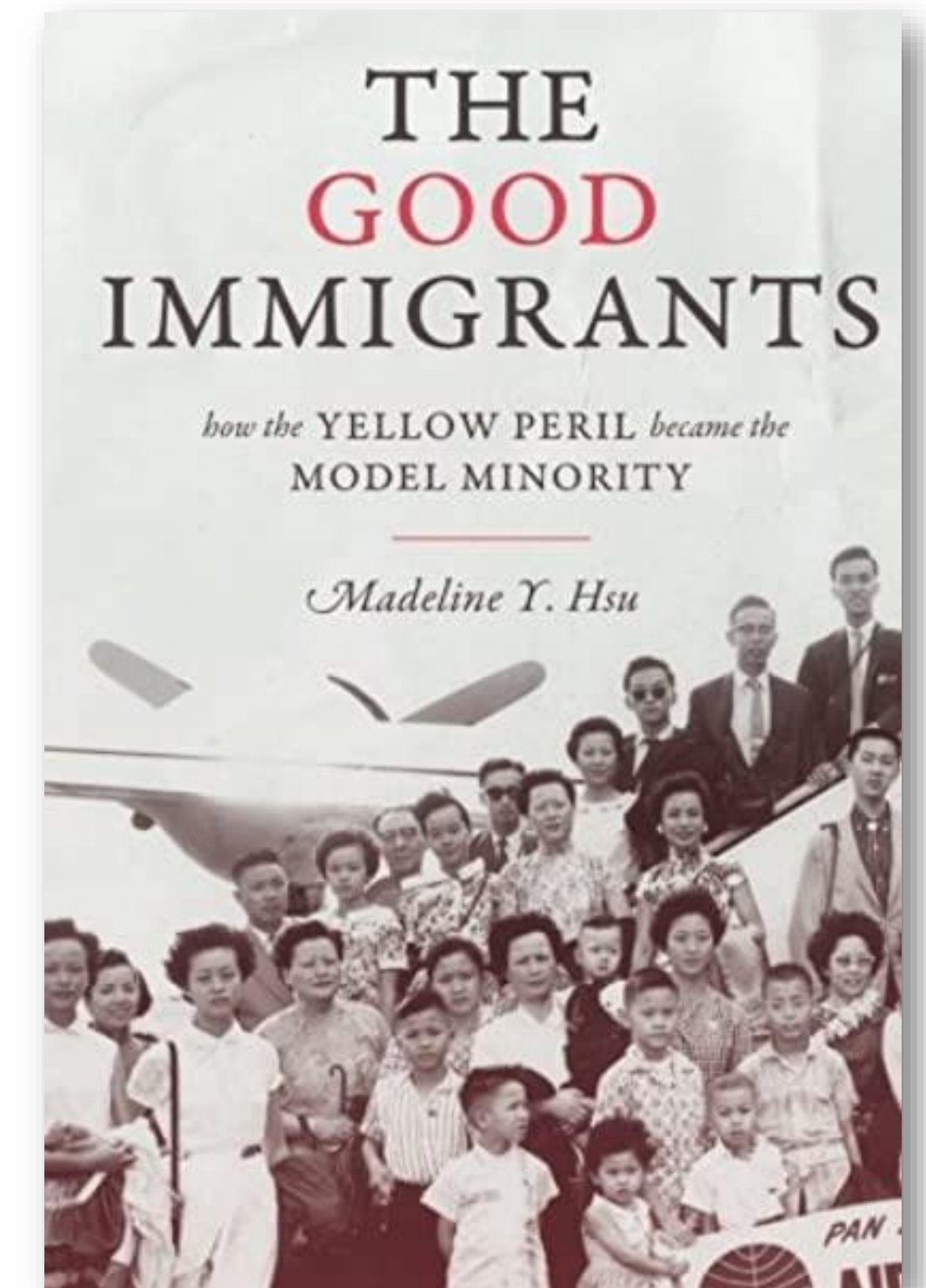


# Model minority stereotype



President Lyndon B. Johnson signs the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act

New York Times, 1966



# Model minority: A recent example

Opinions

## Andrew Yang: We Asian Americans are not the virus, but we can be part of the cure

As a way to improve the current situation, Yang implored Asian Americans to demonstrate they are part of the solution by embracing "our American-ness in ways we never have before."

"We need to step up, help our neighbors, donate gear, vote, wear red white and blue, volunteer, fund aid organizations, and do everything in our power to accelerate the end of this crisis. We should show without a shadow of a doubt that we are Americans who will do our part for our country in this time of need," Yang wrote in his op-ed.



# Coronavirus fears show how 'model minority' Asian Americans become the 'yellow peril'

While viruses and other pathogens do not discriminate between hosts based on race, ethnicity, nationality or immigration status – stigma and misinformation certainly do.



# Racial trauma

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- ❖ Psychological trauma: Change to the mind as a result of a distressing event
- ❖ Posttraumatic stress response: increased anxiety/fear, hypervigilance, avoidance, alterations in mood and cognition
- ❖ Race-based traumatic stress theory (Carter), Minority stress theory (Meyer)



# Effects of racism on health

- ❖ Experience from “Racialized” events in history: Japanese internment, 9/11
- ❖ Decreased well-being, life satisfaction, and self esteem; increased anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation
- ❖ Increased cardiac disease, respiratory conditions, pain, disability, and and all-cause mortality

## Potential Impact of COVID-19–Related Racial Discrimination on the Health of Asian Americans

COMMENTARY

Anti-Asian discrimination and assaults have increased significantly during the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, contributing to a “secondary contagion” of racism. The United States has a long and well-documented history of both interpersonal and structural anti-Asian discrimination, and the current pandemic reinforces longstanding negative stereotypes of this rapidly growing minority group as the “Yellow Peril.”

We provide a general overview of

*Justin A. Chen, MD, MPH, Emily Zhang, MA and Cindy H. Liu, PhD*

Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been accompanied by a dramatic increase in discrimination against Asian individuals worldwide, creating a form of socially mediated “secondary contagion.” Asians of all ethnicities have been scapegoated, verbally attacked with racial slurs, coughed at, spat on,

encourages reporting COVID-19–related hate crimes to police. The New York City, New York, attorney general’s office also launched a hotline to track these incidents.

Asian Americans comprise just 5.6% of the US population. However, they are the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in

and experience of Asian Americans as a unified racial group.

Asians in this country share a long and well-documented history of discrimination and have been the frequent targets of both interpersonal and structural persecution. We define key terms, including “discrimination” and “racism,” provide a general over-



# Race is not black or white

- ❖ US has no national curriculum that requires the teaching of any history
- ❖ Asian American history incompletely taught at best; does not portray US positively
- ❖ Asians usually left out of conversations about race



Waxman OB. Time Magazine. Mar 30, 2021.

## Are Asian Americans White? Or People of Color?

Why you can trust us

BY NASEEB BHANGAL, M.ED. &  
QIYAN POON, PH.D.

5 MIN READ

JAN 15, 2020



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Emotional Wellness

# ASIAN AMERICANS

NOW STREAMING

The history of identity, contributions, and challenges experienced by Asian Americans. [MORE](#)

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Breaking Ground

05/11/2020 | 54m 11s



A Question of Loyalty

05/12/2020 | 54m 1s



Good Americans

05/12/2020 | 54m 11s

# Society is speaking up

## The Washington Post

The Post's View

**Opinion:** The surge of attacks against Asian Americans requires attention and swift solutions

**NEWS** CHAUVIN TRIAL PLAN YOUR VACCINE COVID-19 POLITICS U.S. NEWS OPINION WORLD BUSINESS TECH

ASIAN AMERICA

### Jay Leno and why Asian jokes have gotten a pass for so long

"If you're arming the audience with racist ideas, they're going to go out into the world and repeat your jokes," one comedian and writer said.



Microsoft  
@Microsoft

Microsoft condemns hate, racial discrimination, and violence in all forms. #StopAsianHate



5:35 PM · Mar 12, 2021

6.2K 1.1K Share this Tweet

## Daniel Dae Kim Speaks at Congressional Hearing, Calls for Measures Condemning Anti-Asian Hate

Kim spoke during a House Judiciary Subcommittee hearing, urging lawmakers to take measures to condemn racism against Asian Americans.



Ryan Lattanzio  
Mar 18, 2021 5:05 pm



## The New York Times

*Senate Resoundingly Passes Bill to Target Anti-Asian Hate Crimes*



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

# Our community is speaking up

**The New York Times**

## *Amid Awakening, Asian-Americans Are Still Taking Shape as a Political Force*

Divided by generation, ethnicity and class, but currently galvanized by a surge of racially motivated attacks, Asian-Americans are growing rapidly as political players.

## *Asian-American Business Leaders Fund Effort to Fight Discrimination*

A new foundation is starting with \$250 million in backing from influential executives and major companies.

## #AAPI WOMEN STRONG

ORGANIZING BEYOND A HASHTAG

An Evening of Allyship and Solidarity

FEATURING

VIRTUAL EVENT  
APRIL 21, 2021  
7:00 PM EST

Tickets start at \$25



Margaret Cho



Hillary Clinton



Michelle Kwan



Padma Lakshmi

HOSTED BY

Public Wise



Lucy Liu



Olivia Munn



Lea Salonga



**POLITICO** MAGAZINE

OPTICS

## **'I Have Never Seen the Asian American Community Galvanized Like This'**

In striking black-and-white images, veteran photojournalist Yunghi Kim captures a turning point for Asian Americans.



The MGH Center for  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness

# Agenda

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1. Asian American and international student mental health
2. COVID-19
3. An innovative approach for engaging psychiatrically underserved populations



# Culture and my career

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"How do you take this great training that you are getting at MGH, McLean, and HMS, and make it available to people like your parents?"

- Albert Yeung to me, c. 2010



# Overcoming barriers by shifting focus

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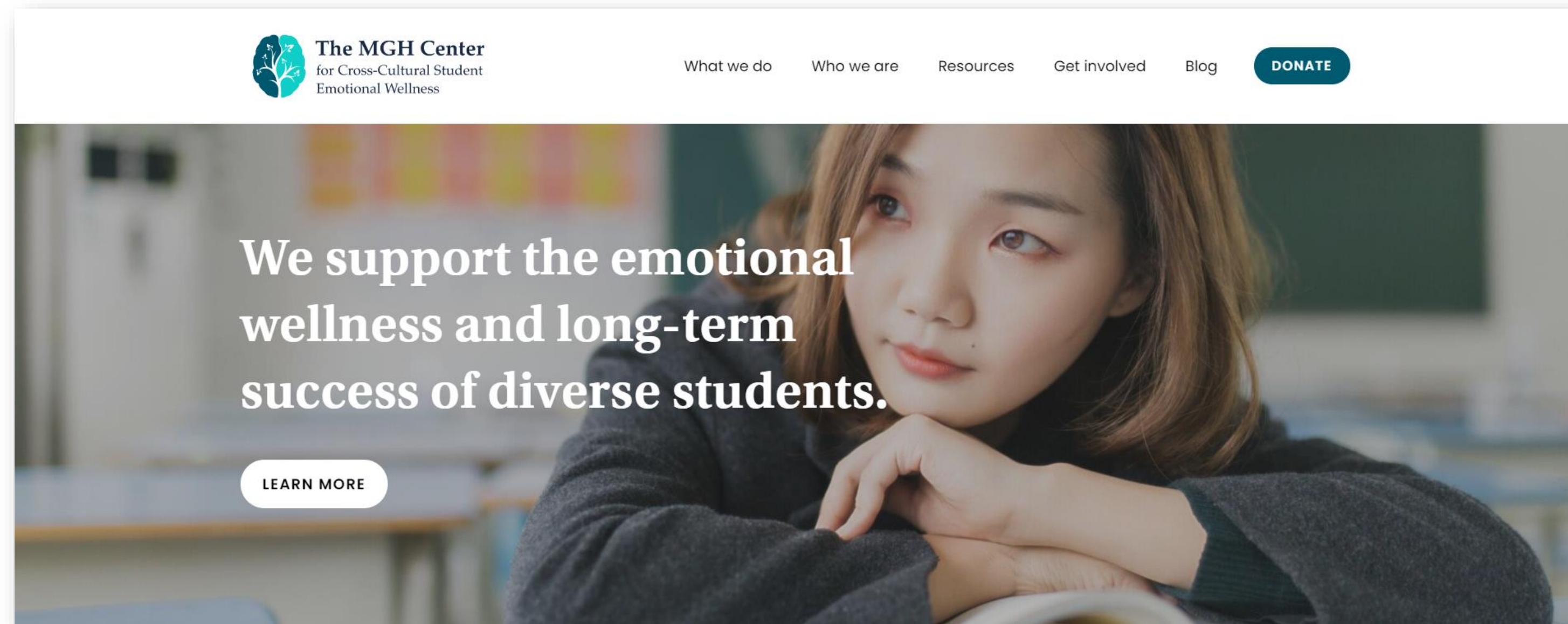
- ❖ Children's education a priority for many Asian immigrant families
- ❖ Connecting emotional wellness to long-term success
- ❖ Relative de-emphasis of psychiatric terminology



# About our Center



- ❖ Founded November 2014 by three Boston-area psychiatrists
- ❖ Increasing referrals of Chinese international students; informed by cross-cultural clinical work, public health, parenting, personal experiences
- ❖ Volunteer-operated program within non-profit academic medical center (MGH)



## Chinese International Students: An Emerging Mental Health Crisis

Justin A. Chen, MD, MPH, Lusha Liu, MD, PhD, Xudong Zhao, DrMed, Albert S. Yeung, MD, ScD

The number of international students at US colleges and universities has nearly doubled during the past 20 years, from 450,000 in 1993 through 1994 to a record high of more than 886,000 in 2013 through 2014, or 4% of the total US higher education population. By far the lion's share of these students now hail from China (31% of the total, or 274,439 students)—a 6-fold proportional increase over the past 15 years.

Several factors contribute to this robust expansion. Institutions of higher education increasingly value diversity and global reach, while also recognizing that international students' ability to pay full tuition helps subsidize their US-born classmates. Meanwhile, a university degree from the United States is a potent status symbol for China's growing middle and upper classes. In fact, so strong is the desire to gain entry into a selective university that Chinese parents have begun enrolling their children at prestigious US secondary schools in hopes of gaining a head-start on the admissions process.

This arrangement may benefit schools economically, but it also generates unique challenges for students due to profound cross-cultural differences. Today's Chinese international students grew up during a time of unprecedented social and political upheaval following the People's Republic of China's 1978 economic opening to the West. Often, the unique experiences and values these individuals bring to campus conflict with those of their US-born classmates and professors.

This cultural mismatch is exacerbated by challenges affecting all students during the transition to college, including loss of structure, separation/individuation from parents, and increased availability of alcohol and drugs. Most Chinese international students move to the United States at an age when they are particularly vulnerable to the onset of common psychiatric disorders and their sequelae, including poor academic performance, absenteeism, and self-harm. Suicide is the third-leading cause of death in young adults 18 to 24 years old, and Asian American college students are more likely than white students to have had suicidal thoughts and to attempt suicide, although these rates specifically among Chinese international students are currently unknown. The mental health struggles of Chinese international students have become a topic of great concern among secondary school and college counselors, but accurate diagnosis and effective management are often hampered by cultural and language barriers.

Unfortunately, basic systematic research is lacking regarding the prevalence of mental illness, maladaptive behaviors, and suicidal thoughts in Chinese international

students in the US. A cross-sectional survey of 130 Chinese international undergraduate and graduate students at Yale University published by Han and colleagues found that 45% exhibited symptoms of depression (score  $\geq 5$  on the 9-item Patient Health Questionnaire) and 29% exhibited symptoms of anxiety (score  $\geq 5$  on the 7-item Generalized Anxiety Disorder instrument).<sup>1</sup> In comparison, a recent study of university students in Harbin, China found a prevalence of depressive symptoms of just 11.7% using a threshold score of at least 14 on the Beck Depression Inventory (comparable to the cutoff used by Han *et al.*),<sup>2</sup> suggesting that Chinese international students indeed face a greater burden of psychological distress than their counterparts in China.

What are the hypothesized contributors to this heightened distress? Chinese international students have been proposed to be affected by difficulties with communication, social connectedness, homesickness, acculturative difficulties, and racism. Although seemingly disparate and primarily sociocultural in origin, these factors may exert their harmful effects on mental health along a final common pathway involving chronic stress. In addition, low mental health literacy and stigmatization of mental illness and treatment mean that struggling Chinese students are often unaware of available services and/or are reluctant to seek help. Even less is known about the mental health of the growing population of younger Chinese international secondary school students.

Most research to date has focused on the mental health of Chinese international students in the United States, with little attention paid to their developmental trajectories prior to migration. Yet these students' psychological characteristics are undoubtedly shaped by unique features of the rapidly changing society in which they spent their formative years. Among the most obvious of these is the One-Child Policy, which affected nearly all urban Chinese families after 1979. A direct result of this policy is the "421 generation" (421时代), in which a "singleton" child is reared by 2 parents and 4 grandparents. As demonstrated by the colloquial designation "little emperors" (小皇帝), this policy has widely been assumed to exert harmful effects on psychological development. Some studies have asserted that singleton children are "more egocentric and uncooperative" and "unable to manage impulses for immediate gratification."<sup>3</sup> Although other research contradicts these findings, the enduring consequences of such a sweeping social policy warrant further careful long-term follow-up. In addition, the unprecedented rapidity with which Chinese society has transformed during the past several decades owing to a rapid influx of wealth, particularly in urban areas, cannot be



# Who we are

- ❖ Coalition of clinicians, educators, and researchers
- ❖ Diverse professional perspectives
- ❖ Primary focus on Asian American and international students
- ❖ Volunteer-operated; 100% funded by services and donations

## Executive Team



Justin A. Chen, MD, MPH  
Executive Director & Co-Founder



Juliana Chen, MD  
Associate Director



Cindy Liu, PhD  
Director of Research

## Directors



Jang Cho, MD  
Director of Consortium Program



Yi Yang, PhD  
Director of China Psychoeducation



Xiaoqiao Zhang, PhD  
Director of International Outreach



Sukhmani Bal, MPH  
Director of Community Outreach

## Staff



Jiaming Liu, EdM





## What we do

We create high-quality, evidence-based **resources and services** focused on mental health **education and prevention** for parents, students, educators, and clinicians. We also conduct **pioneering research** regarding the populations we serve. Finally, we facilitate access to **culturally sensitive care** for those who need it.



### For students

Strengthen mental health for yourself and others.

[Learn more >](#)



### For parents

Get information and tools to support your child.

[Learn more >](#)



### For professionals

Engage with our Center's experts and resources.

[Learn more >](#)



The MGH Center *for*  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness

# Focus #1: Education & Prevention

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We educate  
students and  
families



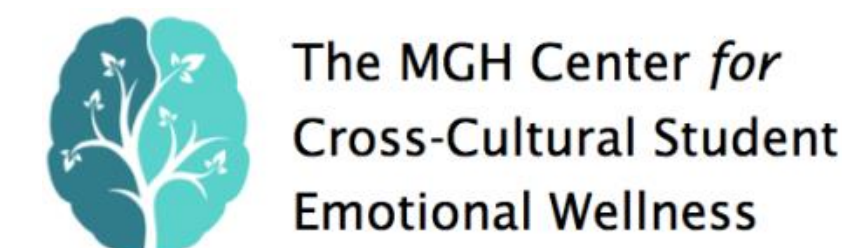
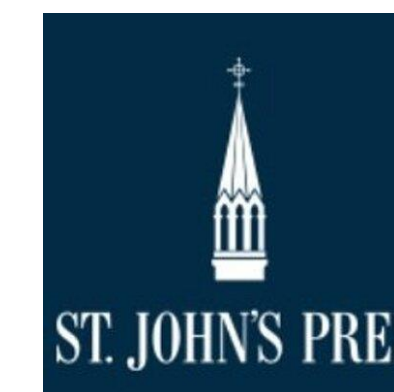
# We educate the educators

## Faculty Trainings

- ✧ Brandeis, University of New Hampshire, Wake Forest University, St. Mark's School, St. John's Prep, Worcester Academy, University of Calgary, Pratt Institute, etc.

## Consortium

- ✧ Year-long, membership-based virtual community supporting international student mental health
- ✧ Core components
  - ✓ Monthly didactics
  - ✓ Case consultation
  - ✓ Online forum
  - ✓ Ancillary services for schools, students, parents
- Launched Oct 2018; now recruiting for fourth year



# Consortium Program for Schools

## “Cloud” Study Abroad, Sleep and Wellbeing

Weiyang Xie, PH.D., HSPP

Clinical Psychologist  
University of Notre Dame

Consulting Psychologist  
United Chinese Americans



## Recent Topics

- ✧ Physically distant but emotionally connected: Ways to create community when we are apart
- ✧ Promoting cultural competency among campus staff
- ✧ Stigma and xenophobia in the setting of COVID-19
- ✧ Traditional East Asian perspectives on health and wellness
- ✧ Cross-cultural perspectives on achievement

## HOW DO CHINESE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND FAMILIES VIEW RACISM AND BLM?



## New service: Virtual International Student Support Groups

- ✧ 8-week program
- ✧ Facilitated by a master clinical psychologist, Yi Yang, PhD
- ✧ Mandarin and English available



The MGH Center *for*  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness

# We educate the community

## DEPRESSION 우울증 - 아시아계 미국인 학생들

우울증은 지속적인 슬픔을 동반하며 삶에 대한 흥미를 잃게 만드는 장애입니다. 우울증은 사람의 생각과 기분, 또한 행동까지 영향을 끼칠 수 있습니다.

**우울증의 증상과 징후들**

**정신적 증상**

- 우울함
- 의욕저하
- 낮은 자존감과 열등감 증가
- 과도한 죄책감
- 집중력 저하
- 자살에 대한 반복적인

## DEPRESSION 亚裔美国人学生中的抑郁症问题

청소년 (만 12-17 세) 의 18.9% 가 우울증을 겪습니다.

아시안계 미국인 고등학생과 대학생들 절망과 견디기 힘든 분노를 경험할 수 있습니다. 일상생활의 어려움이나 자살 시도, 그리고 생각을 해봤을 가능성이 더 높습니다.

**18.9% 가 자살 생각을 해봤다고합니다**

반면, 자살 생각을 해 본 백인 학생들은 15.5% 입니다.

**10% 가 자살을 보았다고합니다**

반면, 자살을 보았다고한 백인 학생들은 6.2% 입니다.

**DEPRESSION 抑郁症的征兆**

情绪症状

- 抑郁的心情
- 参与活动的兴趣和快感减退
- 感到没有价值
- 过度的不适当的负罪感
- 难以思考或集注意力
- 反复地想到死亡或自杀

## DEPRESSION Among Asian American Students

The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

Depression is a mood disorder that causes a persistent feeling of sadness and loss of interest. The symptoms of depression can affect how you feel, think, and behave.

Depression affects around 12.8% of adolescents (age 12-17) (1 in 8 adolescents)

Asian American high school and college students are more likely than White students to experience hopelessness and overwhelming anger. They are also more likely to have felt too depressed to function and to have seriously considered or attempted suicide.

**18.9%** of Asian American high school students report considering suicide versus 15.5% of whites

**10.8%** of Asian American high school students report having attempted suicide versus 6.2% of whites

**SIGNS of Depression**

**Emotional Symptoms**

- Depressed mood
- Diminished interest or pleasure in activities
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Feelings of excessive or inappropriate guilt
- Trouble thinking or concentrating
- Recurrent thoughts of death



"Let's Talk!"

## Promoting the Success and Well-being of Asian and Asian American Students



HARVARD  
GRADUATE SCHOOL  
OF EDUCATION



**The MGH Center**  
*for Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness*



The MGH Center *for*  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness

# Let's Talk! Supporting Asian and Asian American Students Through COVID-19



The MGH Center *for*  
Cross-Cultural Student  
Emotional Wellness

## Webinar Series

Thank you for your interest in our webinar series, "Let's Talk! Supporting Asian and Asian American Students Through COVID-19." This series has been organized through a collaboration between the MGH Institute of Health Professions, the **MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Emotional Student Wellness**, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education **Let's Talk! Conference**.

**Webinar #1: Anti-Asian Racism during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Webinar #2: Living Through a Pandemic: Understanding, Coping, and Finding Meaning**

**Webinar #3: Predictable Parenting for Unpredictable Times: Promoting the Success and Wellbeing of Asian and Asian-American Students through COVID-19**

**Webinar #4: The Challenges International Students Face During COVID-19 and How Parents Can Be Supportive (Mandarin session)**

**Webinar #5: Understanding and Supporting Asian International Students during COVID-19**

**Webinar #6: Asian American Parents: Understanding and Supporting LGBTQ+ Children**

**Webinar #7: Anti-Blackness and Racism in the Asian Community**

**Webinar #8: Asian Allyship with the Black Community**



The MGH Center *for*  
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Emotional Wellness



MGH CCCSEW & HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL PAOL PRESENT:

# OUR SHARED HISTORIES: PAN-ASIAN AND BLACK COMMUNITIES

SATURDAY, JULY 11TH  
2:00-3:30PM EDT

REGISTER AT: [BIT.LY/OUR-SHARED-HISTORIES](https://bit.ly/our-shared-histories)



## ANTI-BLACKNESS AND RACISM IN THE ASIAN COMMUNITY



**SAM HYUN**  
COMMISSIONER OF THE  
ASIAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION OF MASSACHUSETTS



**JOSEPHINE KIM, PH.D**  
LECTURER ON EDUCATION  
HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



**AKRITI BHAMBI**  
CHIEF OF STAFF FOR MASS. STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
MARJORIE C. DECKER

THURSDAY, JULY 23RD  
8:00-9:30PM EDT

REGISTER AT: <https://tinyurl.com/y37ogj47>



The MGH Center for  
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Emotional Wellness

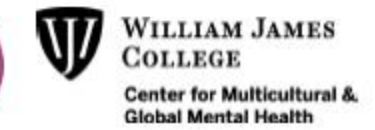
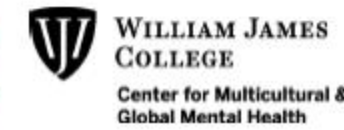
I would like to hear more discussion and experience sharing with regard to education of our young children who born / educated as Americans, on the topic of racism against asians. For example, my children are fortunate enough to have not directly experienced their own racism moment yet, how to bring up this topic in a way that raise their awareness about the real world they live / will be living in, without causing unnecessary fear, anxiety and depression?

## COVID-19 has dramatically impacted our Asian community



### how are you and your children talking about racism?

Register for our free webinar:  
**Talking to Teens about Anti-Asian Discrimination in the Era of COVID-19: Guidance from Research and Practice**



Join this special webinar and Q&A for parents to learn about the negative impacts of racism and discrimination on the mental health of our youth, the critical importance of parents supporting their children, and practical strategies for talking about anti-Asian discrimination at home.



Justin Chen, MD



H. Chris Hahm, PhD



Cindy H. Liu, PhD



Michelle Mu



Catherine Vuky, PhD



Ellen Yang, MA



# 2021 PROFESSIONALS CONFERENCE FOR EDUCATORS AND CLINICIANS

Promoting the Success and Well-Being of Asian and Asian American Students



Let's Talk! 2021 Professionals Conference is especially designed for professionals who support the emotional wellness of Asian and Asian American students in K-12 schools, higher education, and in the community. Topics to be covered include mental health of Asian students; impacts of anti-Asian racism and COVID-19; unique experiences of Asian international students, Southeast Asian refugees and immigrant students; school-based strategies for supporting Asian American and Asian international students; and the importance of raising the visibility of Pan-Asian students.



REGISTER HERE  
EARLY BIRD ENDS 3/25

For conference details and information on Continuing Education credits, visit [www.talkhse.org](http://www.talkhse.org)

WEEK 1

APRIL 1

THURSDAY

7:00-9:30 P.M. EST

## "Mainland" Film Screening

Featuring Director Miao Wang

*Followed by Multidisciplinary Panel Discussion and Q&A*

WEEK 2

APRIL 8

THURSDAY

7:00-9:00 P.M. EST

## Caring for Students of Asian Descent

Mini-Keynote: Justin Chen, MD, MPH, MGH CCCSEW & Harvard Medical School

*Including presentations from Clinicians/Researchers, Followed by Panel Discussion and Q&A*

WEEK 3

APRIL 15

THURSDAY

7:00-9:00 P.M. EST

## In Their Own Voices

Mini-Keynote: Josephine M. Kim, PhD, LMHC, Harvard Graduate School of Education

*Featuring Diverse Students and Their Stories, Followed by Panel Discussion and Q&A*

WEEK 4

APRIL 22

THURSDAY

7:00-9:00 P.M. EST

## Let's Talk! Together: Think Tank & Networking

How Can We Better Supporting Asian & Asian American Students and Ourselves

*Collaborative Small-Group Problem-Solving and Sharing Across Groups, Including Affinity Space for Asian Professionals*

WEEK 5

APRIL 29

THURSDAY

7:00-9:00 P.M. EST

## In the (Virtual) Classroom

Mini-Keynote: Jean Yu-Wen Wu, PhD, Emerita, Tufts University

*Including Presentations from Educators/School-affiliated Professionals, Followed by Panel Discussion and Q&A*



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness



HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL AFFILIATE



HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness



# Resources for taking action



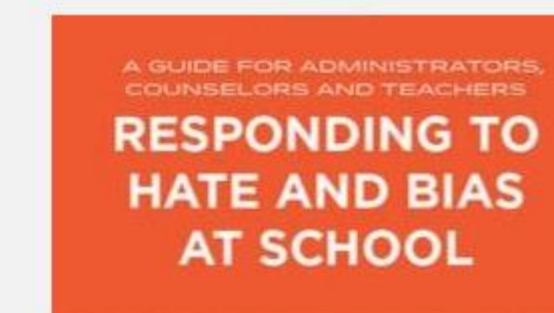
Who we are    What we do

## For Educators



### Speaking Up Against Racism Around the Coronavirus (Learning for Justice)

Historical context and guide for educators for tackling discussions about bias and stereotypes in the classroom



### Responding to Hate and Bias at School (Learning for Justice)

Guide for educators before, during, and after a crisis

## For Therapists



### What is Racial Trauma (Mental Health America)

And where does it come from: individual and system racism?



### Uncovering the Trauma of Racism: New Tools for Clinicians (Psychology Today)

Diagnosing and treating racial trauma



### Ethnic and Racial Identity and the Therapeutic Alliance (Psychology Today)

Learn why a racial match might not always be a good idea



### How Well-Meaning Therapists Commit Racism (Psychology Today)

Examples of microaggressions by therapists



### How to Talk About Race With Your Therapy Clients (Psychology Today)

Tips and strategies for engaging with clients through a more culturally-informed lens



### Assessing Clinical Trauma (Laboratory for Culture and Mental Health Disparities, CMHD)

Scales and measures used for clinical assessment of racial trauma

[www.mghstudentwellness.org/racism](http://www.mghstudentwellness.org/racism)



The MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

# Focus #2: Research

Novel research informs creation of innovative tools and resources



## Project ALICE

ALICE stands for Acculturation, Loneliness, Identity, Community/Social support, and Emotional Wellbeing of Chinese International Students. The purpose of this study is to understand the current experiences of Chinese international students during the turmoil of the COVID-19 pandemic and the U.S. presidential election.



## CARES Study

The goal of the *COVID-19 Adult Resilience Experiences Study (CARES)* is to understand the physical and emotional well being of **young adults** during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are currently enrolling a cohort of 2,000 young adults in the United States to participate in our research study funded by the National Science Foundation.



## Project PRAISE

The goal of *Pandemic Resilience in Asian Immigrants: Study of Experiences (PRAISE)* is to learn more about the experiences of **Asian immigrant parents** during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through online surveys, we hope to learn more about family experiences, parenting, stress, social support, and resilience during this difficult time.

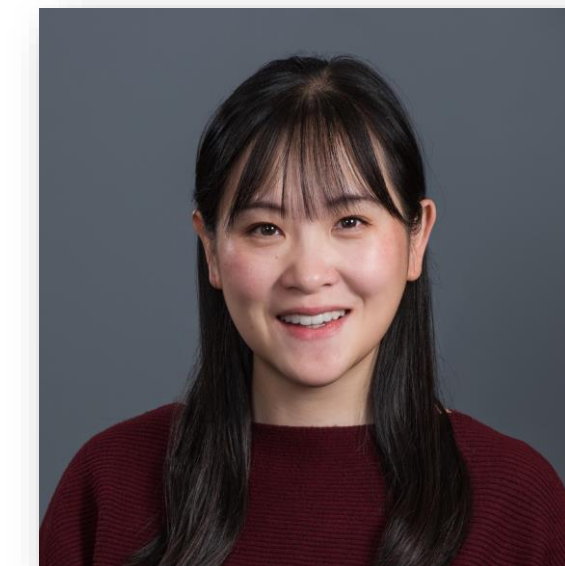


The MGH Center *for* Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness

# Focus #3: Culturally sensitive care

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- ❖ Critical shortage of mental health services
- ❖ We are NOT a clinical service
- ❖ Training opportunities?
- ❖ RWJ CS project – compiling national databases



<b>CLINICAL SCHOLARS</b>	2020-2023, Cohort 5
	<b>Breaking Silences in the Model Minority: A national intervention to increase mental health awareness and decrease stigma in Asian immigrant families</b>



# Thank you!

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mghstudentwellness.org



/mghstudentwellness



mgh\_cccsew



info@mghstudentwellness.org

Please follow our journey on social media, and contact me to get involved!  
[chen.justin@mgh.harvard.edu](mailto:chen.justin@mgh.harvard.edu)



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