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**Mental Health Issues:
Asians Have Those?**

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Introduction

“Asian Americans”- Is there really such a thing?

Primary focus of today’s talk is on East Asian groups, specifically Korean and Chinese Americans. South East Asians/Indians have a qualitatively different history and so their experience may differ.

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Why we care

Minority individuals will eventually make up 50% of the US population by the year 2050, with Asians being one of the fastest growing minority populations

Korea has been one of the top ten sources of immigration to the US during the past two decades

Based on NJ Census information, Asians represent 7.4% of NJ population, but 4.4% of US population

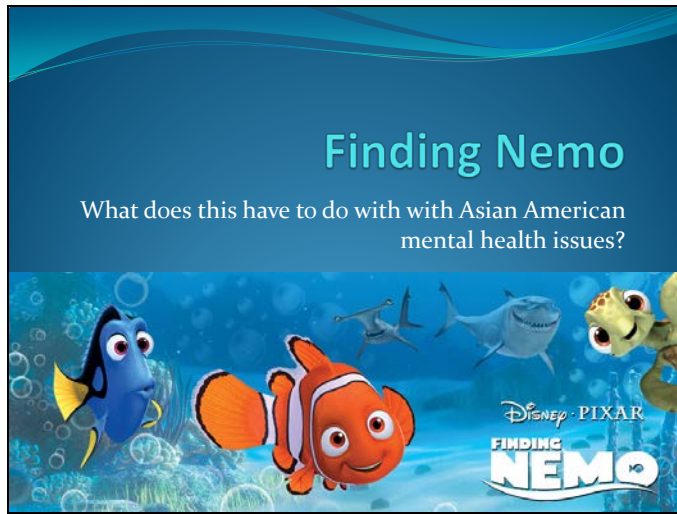
In the 25-34 age group, Asian Americans have the highest proportion of suicide

Korean Americans more likely to use substances to deal with emotional problems

Childhood Asian immigrants (≤ 12) and US born Asians have greater risk for psychiatric disorders

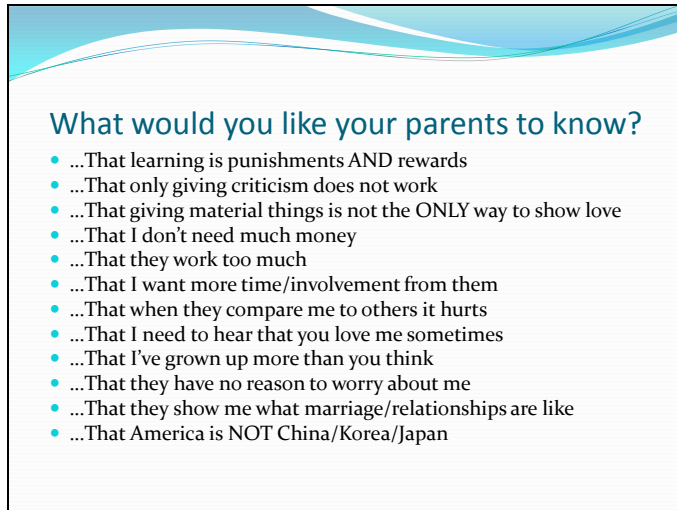
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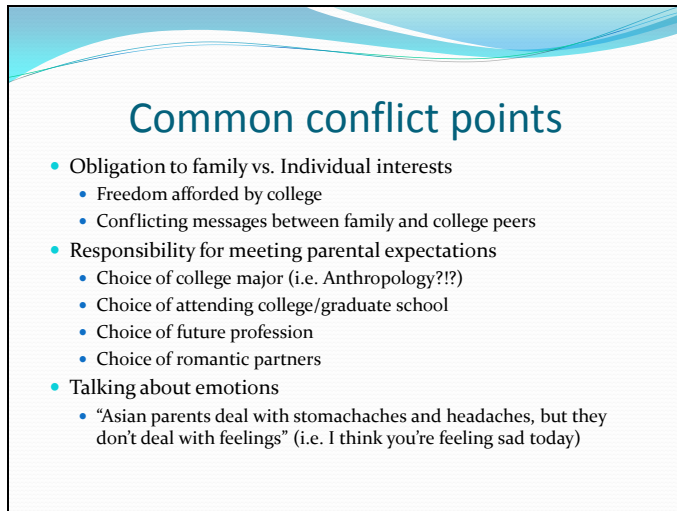
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Language Issues

- Language gaps between acculturated children and less acculturated parents
 - How do you say...?
 - Intense power struggles for independence and authority
- Understand cultural differences in communication patterns and styles
 - Indirect communication style
 - High context vs. low context communication
 - Differing levels of eye contact
 - Discomfort with direct confrontation or openly disagreeing

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South Korea-1970's



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South Korea-2014



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Impact of Immigration

- Parents may represent an earlier manifestation of culture (i.e. 1970's Korea)
- "Parachute" children and "Astronaut" parents
- Intense pressure placed on children by reminding them that they are the reason the parents immigrated
 - Unrealistic expectations
- Parents want more for their children than they had
- Role reversals that occur
 - Parentified immigrant children

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Asian Cultural Values

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Understanding Confucianism and Asian Cultural Values

- Hierarchical family unit and distinct social structure
 - Interpersonal harmony through group focus
 - Mirroring - what is mirrored by mothers?
 - Warrior father/son "complex"
- Role of the individual - Interpersonal Harmony
 - Knowledge and acceptance of one's place in society; obedience to duty to the group over individual desires
 - Filial piety-love and respect for one's family/ancestors
 - Psychosocial homeostasis - dependence on the other
- Multiple and specific names for individuals in relation to others
 - Complex kinship names, rather than use of informal first names

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Understanding Confucianism and Asian Cultural Values cont.

- Hiding or disavowal of strong feelings
 - Emotional restraint and self-control valued
 - Parents may not show physical affection
- Highly attuned social sensitivity
 - Misreading of social cues can be common and problematic
- Achievement and success stressed in order to improve family name
 - The issue of face and intense social comparisons
 - Children as extensions of parents
- Role of Shame and Guilt

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Korean Cultural Concepts

- "Jip-an" – within the house
 - Clear delineation between who is "in" and "out"
- Jeong
 - Extreme emphasis on and attention to another's well-being and comfort; hypersensitivity to small details of the other's presentation, i.e. small talk from waiting area to office
- Noon-chi
 - Ability to pick up external cues to choose one's course of action
- Boon-soo
 - Acceptance of one's place in the social hierarchy with minimal resistance
- Chae-myun
 - Face-saving – protecting the honor of the individual and family

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Asian Americans: The Model Minority

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Asian Americans A Model Minority

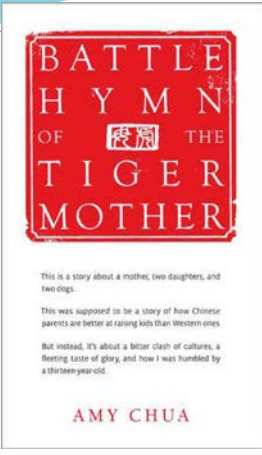
- Belief that Asian Americans are a minority that have “made it” in America and are immune to stresses of minority status
 - Disproportionately high levels of educational achievement
 - 42% of Asian Americans held at least a BA
 - 10% at Harvard, 22% at Berkeley, 19% at MIT, 19% at UPenn (as of 1990)
 - 71% at U-Hawaii, 56.4% at UC-Irvine, 38% at UCLA, 17.9% at Rutgers (as of 2000)
 - Occupational success
 - Higher household median income
 - Social indicators
 - High incidence of intermarriage between Asian Americans and Whites
 - Low rates of mental illness
 - Underutilization of mental health services

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Or are they?

- Large numbers of Asian Americans are uneducated, proportionately larger than other majority and ethnic minority groups
- Higher prevalence of poverty (Chinatown)
- More than one wage earner in the family
- Fewer than 1% of college presidents
- Large Anti-Asian sentiment still exists; hate crimes
- Use of “official” statistics
 - “Individual failures” are a reflection on entire family name
- Present at PCP with somatic complaints, rather than psychological issues = no mental illness concerns exist

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Never allowed to:

- Attend a sleepover
- Get less than an A
- Watch TV or play video games
- Not play the piano or violin

Tenacious practice is crucial for excellence

Entirely different parenting model: “Expect the best and don’t settle for anything less.”

“All decent parents want to do what’s best for their children. The Chinese just have a totally different idea of how to do that.”

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Hyperfocus on Performance

- Asian Americans have been shown to spend twice as much time on academics as non-Asians (Eaton & Dembo, 1997)
 - “You can’t be struggling, you’re Asian.”
- Asian Americans report greatest fear of academic failure
 - Taking time for your own “well-being?”
- Asian Grade Scale?
- First-generation students navigating system on their own
- If I don’t fulfill expectations, what/who am I?
- Personal experience suggests that this “focus on performance” is perhaps the central issue for all of the Asian American students I have worked with
- Impact on self-concept/self-esteem

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Underutilization of Mental Health Services by Asian Americans

- Perception that mental health services are unrelated to their needs
 - Do physical symptoms cause anxiety or does anxiety result in physical symptoms?
- Stigma/View of psychological problems as a sign of personal weakness- “Therapy’s for crazy people!”
- Therapists untrained in culturally-sensitive therapy models
- Few therapists of similar racial backgrounds and language
- Asian Americans may present for treatment with the greatest levels of symptom severity, compared with other groups
- May seek help from nonprofessionals, including family, community members, social and religious groups

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Asian Americans and College Counseling Centers

- Conflicting messages between home and peers
- College may be first opportunity for independence/freedom
- Asian Americans may overutilize campus college counseling centers
 - Due to emphasis placed on academic achievement
 - The potential positive impact on educational achievement may be a way to convince students to come to therapy
 - Highest rates of depression for Filipino and Korean Americans

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Acculturation and Ethnic Identity

- Definition
 - Ethnic identity refers to a person's sense of belonging with other members of the ethnic group; formed during interaction between an ethnic and dominant culture, gradual change that occurs during this contact is acculturation (Berry and Kim, 1988)
 - Impacted by many factors, including racism, family history
 - Types of Ethnic Identities:
 - Traditionalists
 - Assimilationists
 - Marginal
 - Bi-cultural

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Working with Asian American Students: General Tips

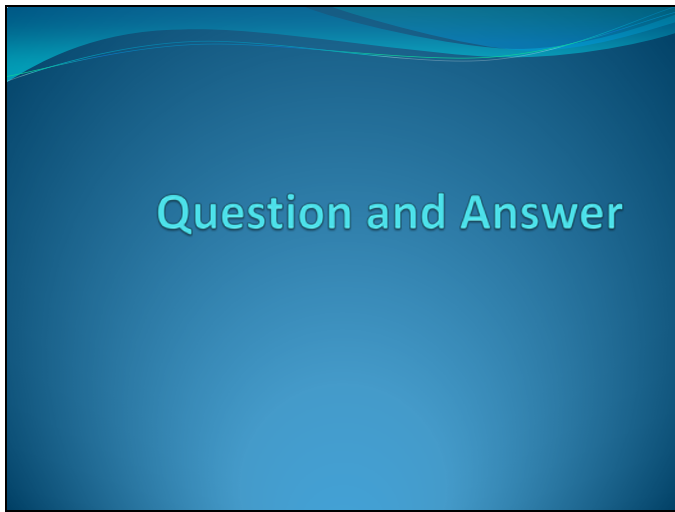
- Importance of “jip-an”
- Most important to convey a willingness to discuss issues surrounding race and culture
- Clash between Mainstream American Cultural Values vs. Asian Cultural Values
 - Interdependence vs. Independence
 - Collective “we” vs. Individualistic “self-first” attitudes
- Consider your own preconceptions about client's race
 - Directly ask how a client identifies their race/ethnicity
- We may look alike, but we are not the same
 - Different Asian groups do not come from the same cultural backgrounds
- White privilege – set of advantages automatically afforded to members of the dominant culture

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Working with Asian American Students: For Teachers and Clinicians

- Teachers
 - Consider placement of tests during the week (not all on one day) and decreasing homework to ease pressure
 - Consider type of assignments and how they may fly in the face of culture
 - Possible parent education nights to increase awareness
 - Be careful not to suggest blame, even indirectly
- Educating clients as to the process, obstacles and outcomes of treatment
- Teacher/Therapist is perceived as the expert authority
- Definition of “healthy psychological functioning?”
 - “True self” vs. “False self”

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