

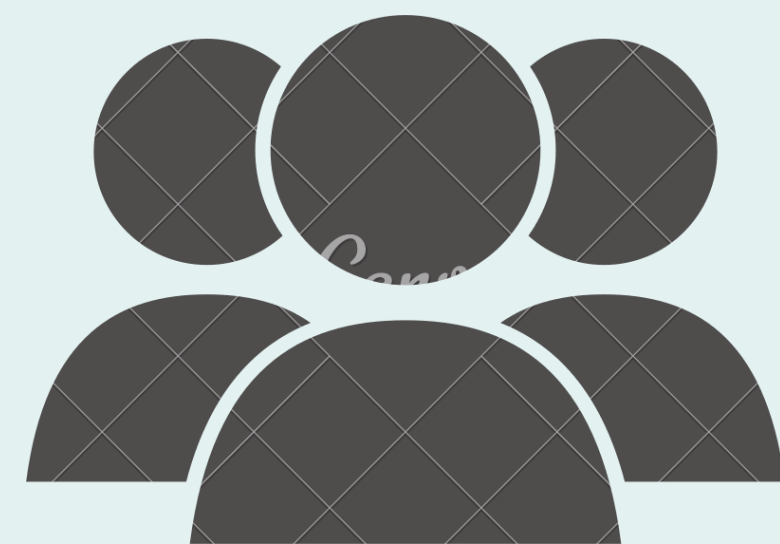
# WHAT I WISH MY TEACHERS UNDERSTOOD ABOUT ME



*A Fact Sheet on Asian/Asian American Racial & Cultural Identity*

## "that being Asian/Asian American means being part of an extremely diverse community"

- There are around 30 nationalities and ethnic backgrounds represented under the term Asian/Asian American (Barringer et al., 1993).
- Alongside this definition, students often identify by a variety of social backgrounds: International students, Parachute Kids, first and second-generation Asian Americans, Third Culture Kids, and Bi-Racial.



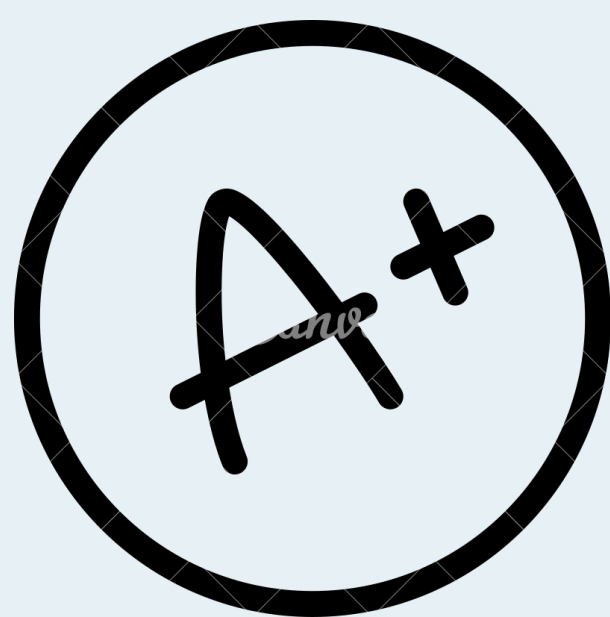
**Third Culture Kids:** individuals who have spent a significant part of their developmental years outside of their parents' home country (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001)

**International Students:** students who have come to the U.S. specifically for the purpose of studies during high school or college (Andrade, 2006)

**Asian American:** individuals whose parents immigrated to the U.S. (2nd generation), or who immigrated to the U.S. at a young age (1.5 generation) for a variety of purposes: education, refugee, work opportunity (Bhugra & Becker, 2005)

**Bi-racial:** individuals whose parents are of two different races (Khanna, 2016)

**Parachute Kids:** individuals who move to a host country for the purpose of primary or secondary education without parental accompaniment (Cheng, 2019)



## "that being forced to show my bad grades to my parents was anxiety inducing"

- Asian cultures place a very high emphasis on education and learning. Asian students often struggle with expectations related to the Model Minority Myth, the stereotype that Asians are highly intelligent, polite, hard-working, and successful (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997).
- This stereotype can be a source of extreme stress for students who do not feel like they meet up to the 'expectations' of what they are told and think they should be (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997).

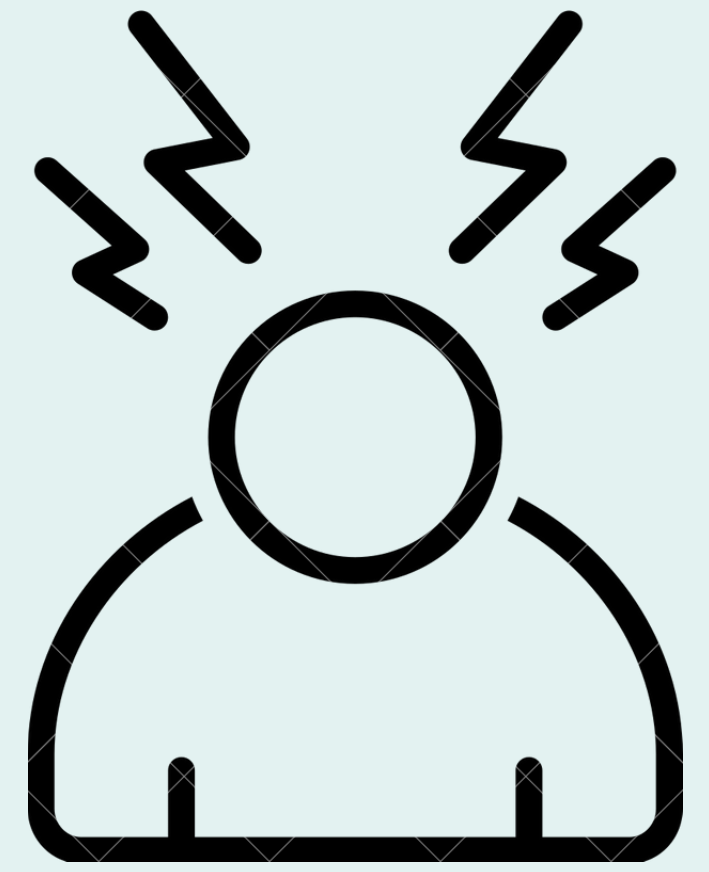
## "that how well I do would impact how the larger [Asian] community would view my parents"

- Asian students can face high pressures from family members to be high achieving and lead successful careers (Qingxue, 2003).
- Asian cultures often follow a collectivist mindset, which means that student's individual success is equated with family success. This can lead to students feeling more pressure, as their success outcomes represent family's success (Qingxue, 2003).



## "that acculturation is stressful"

- Acculturation is the process of cultural and psychological adaptation to a dominant culture, which applies to both Asian internationals and Asian American students (Lee & Cynn, 1991).
- Acculturative stress refers to the stressors associated with being an immigrant or ethnic minority and going through the acculturation process (Romero & Piña-Watson, 2016).
- Asian students can experience stress due to several factors within this process, leading to possible negative mental health outcomes (Lee & Cynn, 1991).
  - Conflicting cultural values
  - Family's legal status
  - Forced vs. voluntary migration
  - Perceived discrimination
  - Not fitting in
  - Language barriers
  - Intra-group marginalization: occurs when one is marginalized within their heritage culture group due to differences in values, behaviors, beliefs (Lee & Cynn, 1991; Romero & Piña-Watson, 2016; Castillo et al., 2007).



## "that any kind of mental health support would have been really helpful"

- Cultural stigma around mental health can be barriers for students to seek professional help (Nishi, 2012).
- Asian and Asian Americans are also the least likely to seek mental health assistance due to cultural stigma (Nishi, 2012).

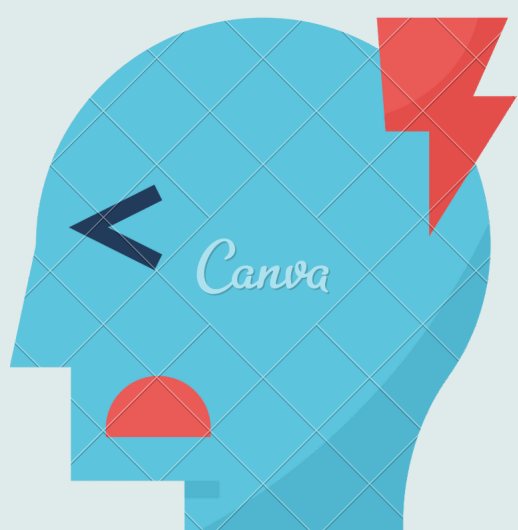
## "that at times I struggle to assert my needs, and I don't often express that I'm overwhelmed"

- Students can often have a hard time expressing their need for help due to stigma around mental health issues that exist in the Asian community as they worry their parents or family won't understand (Nishi, 2012).
- Cultural aspects like keeping emotions to yourself, having high academic expectations, and pressure to 'succeed' can contribute to silence around mental health issues (Nishi, 2012).



## "that it's not okay to tolerate racial jokes in class"

- Racism and discrimination can have significant negative effects on student mental health (Priest et al., 2014).
- Asian students are often at risk to stressors because of racism and discrimination, especially now due to COVID-19 (Le et al., 2020).
- Micro-aggressions are "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward racial minorities, often automatically or unconsciously" (Soloarzano et al., 2000, 1).
- These acts are often overlooked, though they cause significant stress for students.
  - Example: mispronouncing student's names, invalidating student's experiences, making incorrect assumptions (Soloarzano et al., 2000).



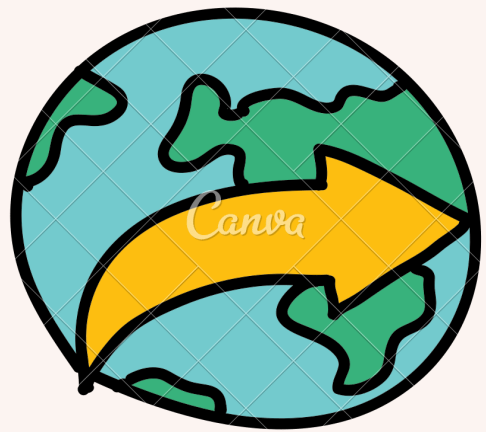
## "that it's tiring to constantly have to code-switch between cultures"

- Code-switching means to change one's behavior for the purpose of fitting into a set of cultural norms or creating a desired social impression (Molinsky, 2007).
- Value Differences Between Eastern vs. Western Cultures
  - Priority of family and community vs. priority on individual
  - Conforming vs. Independence
  - Emphasis on Relational Hierarchy vs. Emphasis on Equality
  - Interpersonal Harmony vs. Assertiveness (Qingxue, 2003)
- Having to go back and forth between two different set of cultural norms could be a source of significant stress for students (Kim et al., 1999).



## Ways to Support Asian/Asian American Students

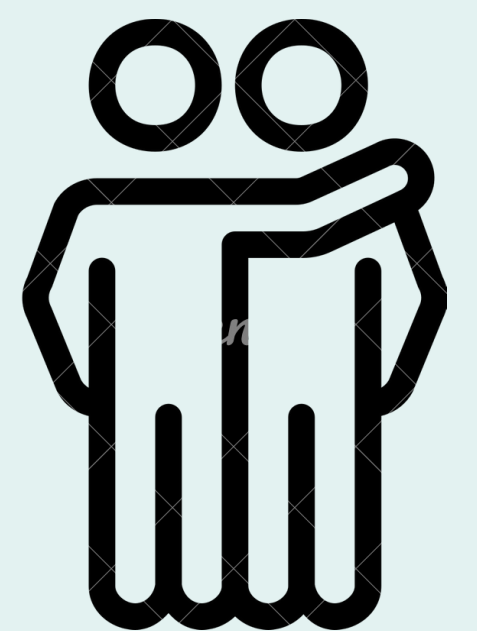
### "that even though we are from different backgrounds, it doesn't mean that we know nothing about Western culture"



- Working against personal biases and stereotypes that may affect interactions with students and upholding a posture of cultural humility can help students feel seen in the classroom (Chavez, 2012).

### "giving us an outlet to express these emotions or just talk about our experiences and connect us with other students in the school [with a similar experience] would have been extremely helpful"

- Being intentional about connecting students or providing accurate resources for students within schools could help more accessible.
  - Example: Creating safe spaces or groups where students of different ethnic backgrounds could connect and share.



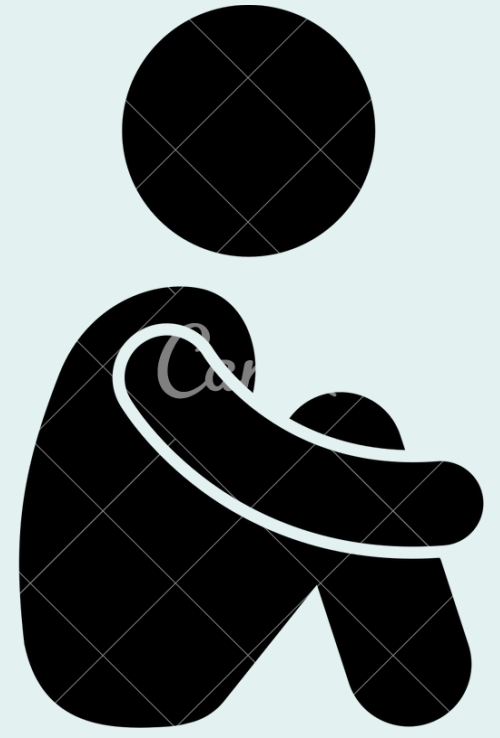
### "how well I did academically would impact how the wider community viewed my parents"

- Being mindful of the way academic pressure can manifest differently for students of Asian descent can help alleviate academic anxiety.
  - Example: Telling a student not to worry about a grade or homework assignment may not be sufficient to reassure, and may lead to a student feeling invalidated or misunderstood (Qingxue, 2003).



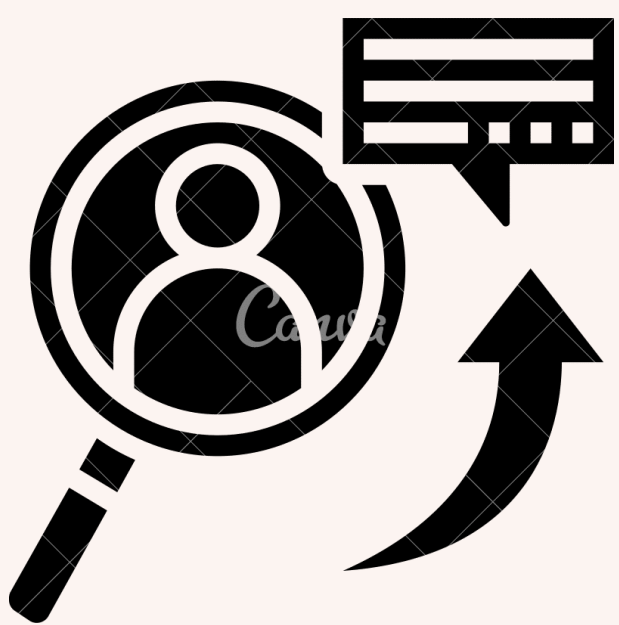
“that kids like me who move around a lot – we may look strong and flexible, but really on the inside, we’re scared and sometimes feel alone”

- Regular emotional / mental health check in with students can make students feel valued.
  - Example: Helping to normalize stress and mental health challenges, educating students about mental health supports available to them, supporting students to prioritize self-care and identify coping strategies can make a difference.



## Additional Resources

- For the accompanying video "What I Wish My Teachers Knew About Me" created by Han Nah Park, visit [talkhgse.org](http://talkhgse.org) or [www.mghstudentwellness.org](http://www.mghstudentwellness.org)
- **Understanding Third Culture Kids**
  - [www.amazon.com/dp/BO1HT6MM9E/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?\\_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](http://www.amazon.com/dp/BO1HT6MM9E/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1)
- **Cultural Humility**
  - [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaSHLbS1V4w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaSHLbS1V4w)
- **MGH Center for Cross-Cultural Student Emotional Wellness (CCCSEW)**
  - [www.mghstudentwellness.org/home](http://www.mghstudentwellness.org/home)
- **Let's Talk Conference**
  - [www.talkhgse.org](http://www.talkhgse.org)
- **Mustard Seed Generation**
  - [www.mustardseedgeneration.org](http://www.mustardseedgeneration.org)



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\*\*The quotes included in this fact sheet were collected from Asian/Asian American students who wanted to amplify Asian/Asian American student voices through sharing their personal stories.