



Penn Arts & Sciences  
East Asian Languages and Civilizations



賓大中文

# Mental Health Wellness 2022 Series #2

## Open Conversation with Alumni on Navigating Cross-Cultural Mental Health

**March 17 2022**

Sponsored by the Matthew Y Wang Memorial Fund

# No man is an island

No man is an island,  
entire of itself;  
every man is a piece of the continent,  
a part of the main.  
If a clod be washed away by the sea,  
Europe is the less,  
as well as if a promontory were.  
as well as if a manor of thy friend's  
or of thine own were.  
Any man's death diminishes me,  
because I am involved in mankind;  
and therefore never send to know  
for whom the bell tolls;  
it tolls for thee.

John Donne

# Alumni Panelist



## Heather Tang W'19

Originally from Toronto, Heather graduated from Wharton in 2019 with a BS in Economics, concentrating in Management, Entrepreneurship, and Innovation. After graduation, Heather worked at Google Canada leading their on-platform COVID-19 response initiatives. Soon, Heather will begin her Masters in Global Affairs at Tsinghua University as a Schwarzman Scholar, Class of 2023



## Laura Gao W'18

Laura is an author and illustrator of graphic novels. Originally from China, Laura grew up in Dallas, TX, and studied data analytics at Penn. Laura also enjoyed her time with Penn Club Basketball, Wharton Cohorts, and The Signal.



## Eddie Cai E'21

Eddie is originally from Princeton, New Jersey and graduated from Penn's Digital Media Design program in 2021. Currently, he works as a software engineer in New York. In his free time Eddie is usually taking art classes, writing, or just finding ways to exercise and explore the city!



## Justin Yue W'20

Justin is originally from the Bay Area and graduated from Wharton in May of 2020. He also earned a certificate in German while on campus. He currently works in finance and is excited about enterprise software. Outside of work Justin enjoys spending time in thrift stores, taking care of his indoor plants and travelling. At Penn, Justin was part of Penn Club Swim and a consulting club.



## Nihar Patil W'20

Nihar is originally from Pleasanton, California and graduated from Penn's NETS program. He is currently an Engineer & Product Manager at an e-commerce startup. He produces electronic music on the side and is currently working on his new album!

# Today's Overview: Open Conversation with Alumni on

1. Why our cultural heritage impacts on our mental health?
2. Immigration history and cross cultural mental health concerns
3. Navigating between generations and cultures
4. Strengthening connection, the heart of building resilience, AAPIs mentorship @Penn

# Why is cultural heritage important to our mental health?

Be aware of unwanted stereotypes...

**Psychology** (identity, motivation and emotion-expression) is shaped by our **historical and cultural factors**, in conjunction with biological and environmental factors.

**Cultural identity** is an important contributor to people's wellbeing. Identifying with a particular culture **gives people feelings of belonging and security**. It also provides people with **access to social networks which provide support and shared values** and aspirations.

**To talk about mental health**, we have to **talk about cultural heritage**.

However, **opinions presented must be carefully examined**. Sometimes they **may represent unwarranted stereotypes**, an assessment of only a subgroup or a particular group of people, or a situation that has since undergone major changes...

AAPI, Asian American, Chinese American, Chinese Canadian...Korean American...

**AAPI: is a very diverse population:** "A person with origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East (i.e. East and Southeast Asia), South Asia, or the Pacific Islands".

# LAYERS OF CULTURE

People even within the same culture carry several layers of mental programming within themselves. Different layers of culture exist at the following levels:

- The national level: Associated with the nation as a whole.
- The regional level: Associated with ethnic, linguistic, or religious differences that exist within a nation.
- The gender level: Associated with gender differences
- The generation level: Associated with the differences between grandparents and parents, parents and children.
- The social class level: Associated with educational opportunities and differences in occupation.
- The corporate level: Associated with the particular culture of an organization. Applicable to those who are employed.

The immigration process can cause a variety of psychological problems related to

- Negotiating loss and separation from country of origin, family members and familiar customs and traditions
- Exposure to a new physical environment
- The need to navigate unfamiliar cultural experiences

Immigration-related stressors can increase suicidal ideation and risk due to the distress associated with cultural stress, social marginalization and intergenerational conflicts/trauma in addition to other psychological disorders

Individuals who migrate experience multiple stresses that can impact their mental well being:

- The loss of cultural norms
- Social isolation due to language barriers
- The loss of religious customs
- The loss of social support systems
- Adjustment to a new culture
- Changes in identity and concept of self.



Immigrant populations have an increased rate of psychosis, and of mood, depression and anxiety disorders, as well as many other adjustment and trauma related mental health issues

- Loss of protective sociocultural factors
- Racial and ethnic health disparities
- Socioemotional burden of racial discrimination from one generation to the next

# Asian Americans youth unique challenges

- Acculturation dissonance with parents' generation
- Racial stereotypes, the model minority
- Discrimination
- Developing identity

Immigrants who navigate between their culture of origin and the mainstream culture in a flexible manner and identify with both cultures have greater resilience

Biculturalism: Individuals can internalize the practices and beliefs of both cultures as part of their identity

Bicultural Competence (by Teresa LaFromboise et.al. 1993)

- **Knowledge cultural beliefs and values**
- **Positive attitudes** towards both groups
- **Communication ability (verbal and non-verbal)**, and language is the major building block to build bicultural competence
- Role repertoire (behaviors and roles)
- Groundedness (a well developed social support system, a sense of being grounded within both culture)

## East West Connection Bicultural Model

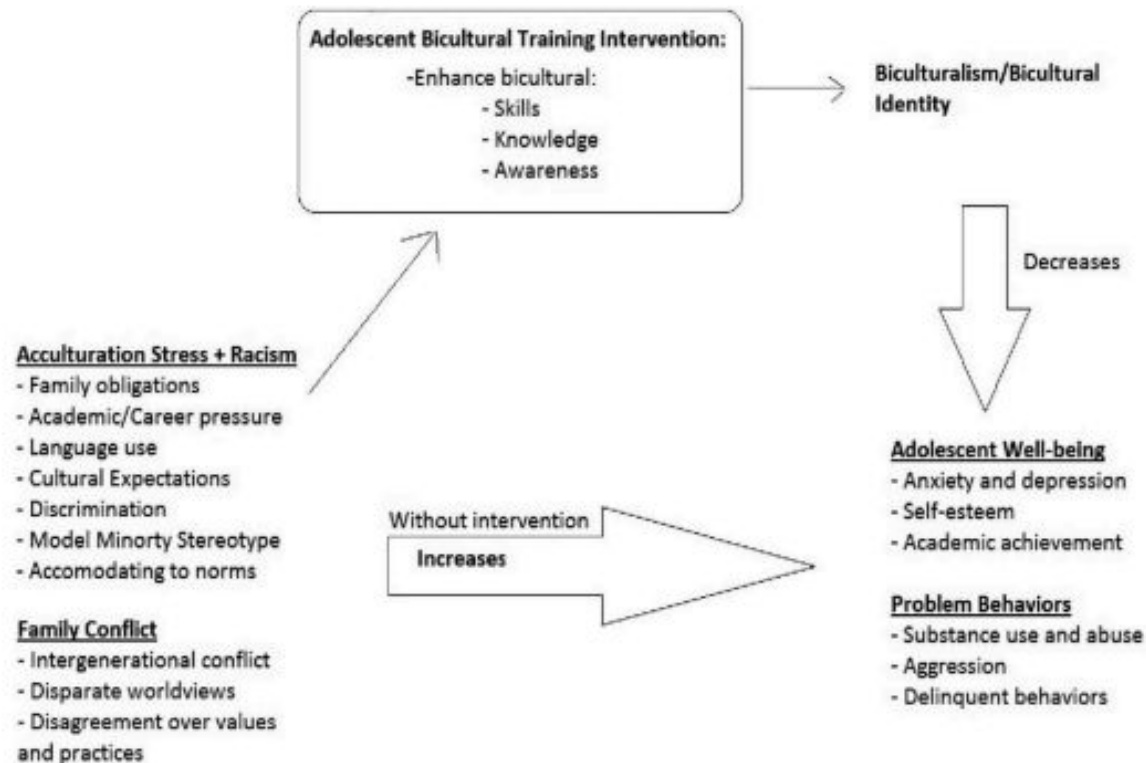


FIGURE 1 East West Connection concept model.

Source: Asian American Identity Development: A Bicultural Model for Youth  
Christopher W. Cheung and Jacqueline M. Swank 2019

# Open Conversation Q & A

- (Everyone) What were your mental health challenges at Penn and how did you deal with them?
- (Everyone) How did you deal with anxiety stemming from Penn's competitive environment? Did the Model Minority myth impact your experiences at Penn?
- (Laura, Nihar, Justin) For people who came from a more homogenous home environment, how do you manage integrating into a more diverse environment at Penn?
- (Everyone) What were the greatest rewards or challenges of your Asian American biculturalism at Penn? How did you navigate this?

# Open Conversation Q & A

- (Eddie, Nihar) What's your perspective on navigating opportunities as an Asian man when currently many seem favored other minority groups and women?
- (Laura) How did you find the courage to take the jump to writing and illustrating from your previous career? Do you consider yourself well-supported in terms of mental health in your family and job?
- (Nihar, Laura, Eddie) Do you talk about mental health or counseling with your family/parents? Is there a good way to do so? And if there's disagreements, how did you deal with the conflict (e.g. help among peers, CAPS, etc.)?
- (Nihar, Dr.Li) How does one help another student showing signs of mental illness or depression?

# Resources

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Myou629Dk68> What Asian Parents Don't Say...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTt8jdK1lGI> Shaping our identity and culture: Tash Aw at TEDxASL

Tash Aw is the author of three novels, *The Harmony Silk Factory*, *Map of the Invisible World* and *Five Star Billionaire*, which have won the Whitbread and Commonwealth Prizes and twice been longlisted for the MAN Booker Prize; they have also been translated into twenty four languages. His short fiction has won an O. Henry Award and been published in *A Public Space* and the landmark *Granta 100*, amongst others

# Homework

- Write a short story about your own (family) immigration history, and give some thoughts on how these experiences impact on how you feel about yourself, your identity.
- Think about what you can do to take care of your mental health. How do you navigate between cultures (generations), if there are conflicts?
- Think about how to break the minority myth/perfection myth or stereotype in your real life--- give your own (authentic) example.



# Resources

## MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

[Asian Mental Health Collective](#) ← AAPI

[Wellness At Penn Instagram](#) ← Penn

[CAPS Tips & Tools](#) ← Penn

[Mental Health Resource Center](#)

[Self-care Assessment](#)

[Self-care Ideas](#)

[Identifying Lifestyle Behaviours](#)

[Determining your personal values](#)

[Identifying Stress, Distress, Crisis](#)

[Emergency Self-Care Worksheet](#)

## PENN SUPPORT NETWORK

- PAACH + Community Houses
- Academic Advisors + Teachers
- RAs & GAs
- Older Mentors in clubs and classes
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

*The HELP Line: 215-898-HELP*

*Counseling and Psychological Services: 215-898-7021*

*Student Health Service: 215-746-3535*

*Office of the Vice Provost for University Life:  
215-898-6081*

*University Chaplain's Office: 215-898-8456*

*Reach-A-Peer Helpline:*

- 215-573-2727 (every day from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m.)
- 215-515-7332 (texting service available 24/7)

# Penn AAPI Alumni Mentorship Program

*A collective of Penn Alumni committed  
to increasing open dialogue around  
mental health in the AAPI community*



↑ **Interested in being a mentee?** ↑

*Scan the code above & we'll reach  
out with more info via email*

Give us feedback!

