



Struggling in Silence

ASIAN AMERICAN MENTAL HEALTH

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Reappropriate (2002-now)
The web's first Asian American
identity / feminism blog

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Mental Health Awareness Week: Top 10 Myths about Asian Americans and Mental Health

October 11, 2013 [Edit](#)



In 1990, Congress declared the first week of October to be Mental Health Awareness Week; today marks the final day of Mental Health Awareness Week 2013. In honour of this week, here are the top 10 myths about Asian Americans and mental health that remain pervasive in our community.

1. Mental health isn't an Asian American issue.

In several studies that specifically examine the incidence of suicide among Asian Americans have found a far greater incidence among Asian Americans than many other ethnic groups. Most notably, Asian American women at multiple ages have higher suicide rates than the national average. In particular, both elderly Asian American women (>65) and men (>65) have the highest suicide rates compared to non-Asians. Suicide is the 8th leading cause of death for Asian Americans, (compared to 11th for the national population). These data strongly suggest a specific and under-addressed disparity in mental health awareness and treatment in the Asian American community.

2. Depression and mental illness is rare in the Asian American community.

Spotlight

JOIN THE GLOBAL MOVEMENT

First Black Friday...
Then Cyber Monday...
And Now #GivingTuesday!

#GivingTuesday
December 3

We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.
- Dr. Viktor Frankl

#GIVINGTUESDAY
DECEMBER 3 | GIVINGTUESDAY.ORG

Contact me to advertise your non-profit in this space (for free).

Reappropriate

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Yun Xu on Canada cancels investor visas: modern Chinese exclusion, or a sign that Canadian citizenship isn't for sale?

? **21 student suicides at Cornell**
How many were Asian American?
between 1996-2006.

- A. 15%
- B. 30%
- C. 55%**

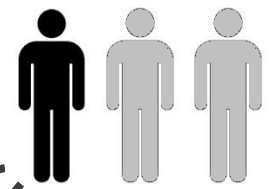
ANSWER:

13 of the 21 student suicides at Cornell between 1996-2006 were committed by Asian American students.

SOURCE: Asian/Asian American Task Force Report

Depression on Campus

- **1 in 3** college-aged students report depression or related symptoms.¹



RISK OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

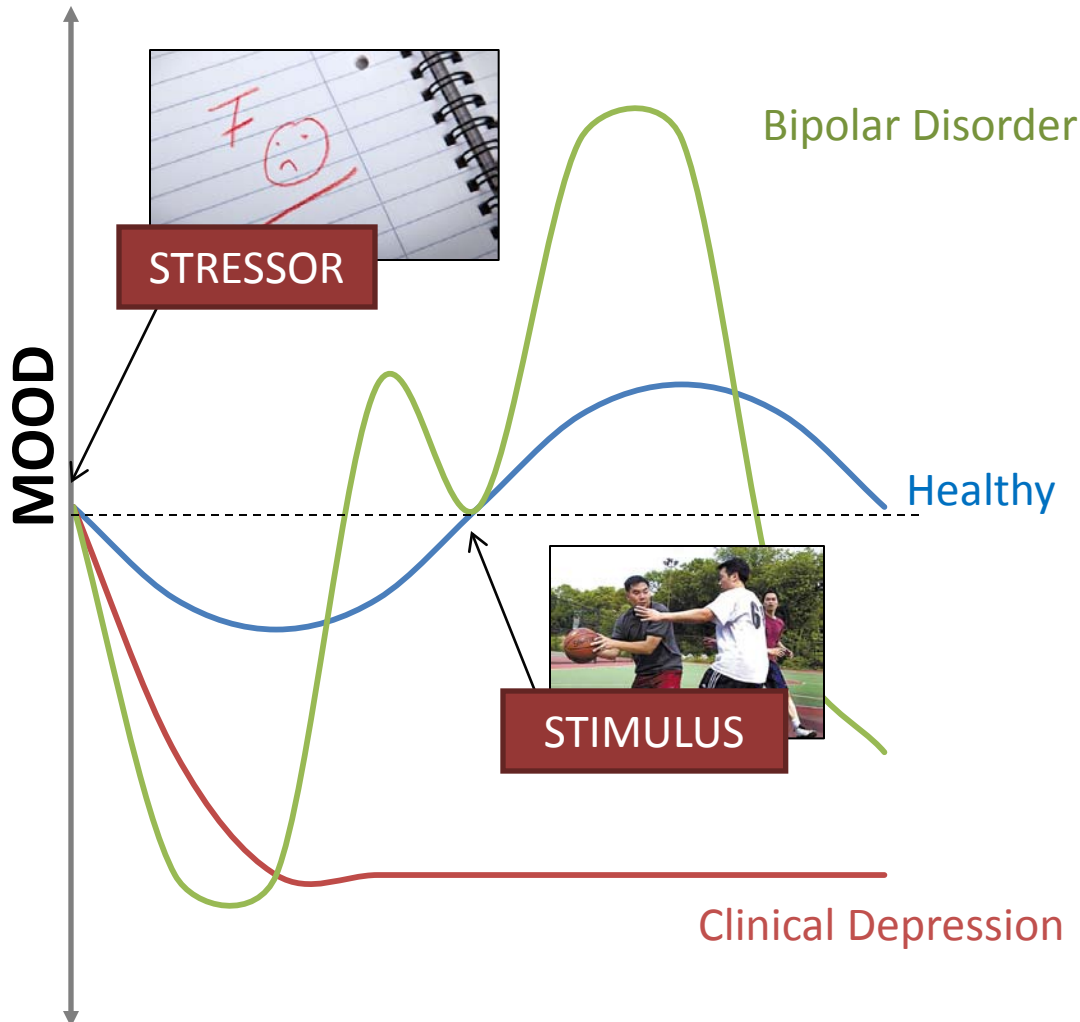
On-campus depression if left untreated can increase risk of drug / alcohol abuse.²

RISK OF SUICIDE³

- 15% of college-aged students report thinking about suicide at one point.
- 7 out of 100,000 die by suicide annually.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for college-aged people.

1. Results of AHCA-NHCA Survey
2. Weitzman 2004
3. Adapted from Suicide Prevention Center

What is Depression?



HEALTHY

Mild fluctuations in mood (happiness or sadness) in response to stimuli that resolve on their own with time.


COMMON MOOD DISORDERS

- **Depression**
(Major Depressive Disorder)
Frequent, extreme feelings of malaise that don't resolve over time, and may even get progressively worse.
- **Bipolar Disorder**
(BPD)
Extreme, uncontrolled fluctuations between depressive episodes and episodes of euphoria or "mania".

Symptoms of Depression?

- Feeling helpless
- Loss of interest in activities
- Loss of appetite
- Social withdrawal
- Unexplained weight changes
- Unexplained changes in sleep patterns
- Unexplained changes in energy
- Anger/irritability
- Fatigue or sluggishness

SMALL GROUPS:
Make a list of some common warning signs and symptoms of depression.



Adapted from art by Sylvie Reuter (SylvieReuter.de)

Adapted from the National Institutes of Mental Health

Possible Causes of Clinical Depression

STRESSOR

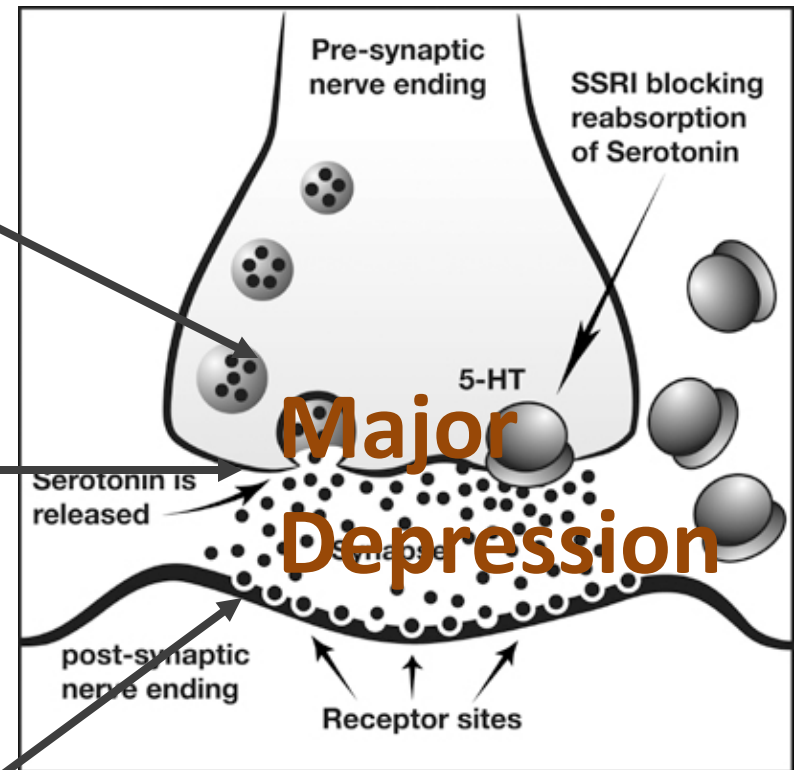
Frequent or higher stress may trigger depression and/or a depressive episode.

BIOLOGY

A biological predisposition for clinical depression.

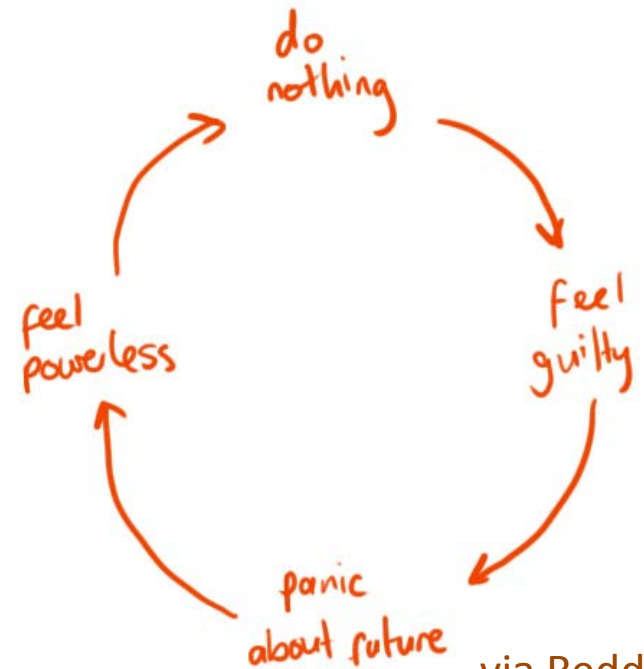
LACK OF HELP

Early diagnoses and treatment can significantly combat symptoms of depression.



The Self-Perpetuating Cycle of Depression

- Combination of anti-depressants and counseling can be highly effective in treating symptoms of depression.
- Many symptoms of depression – apathy, powerlessness, guilt – actually **discourage** treatment.



Untreated Depression & Suicide

- Depression – if left untreated – can significantly increase risk of suicide:
 - Most on-campus suicides involve patients **not actively receiving mental health treatment.**¹
- Groups at highest risk for suicide:²
 - Males
 - Aged 15-24, or 65+

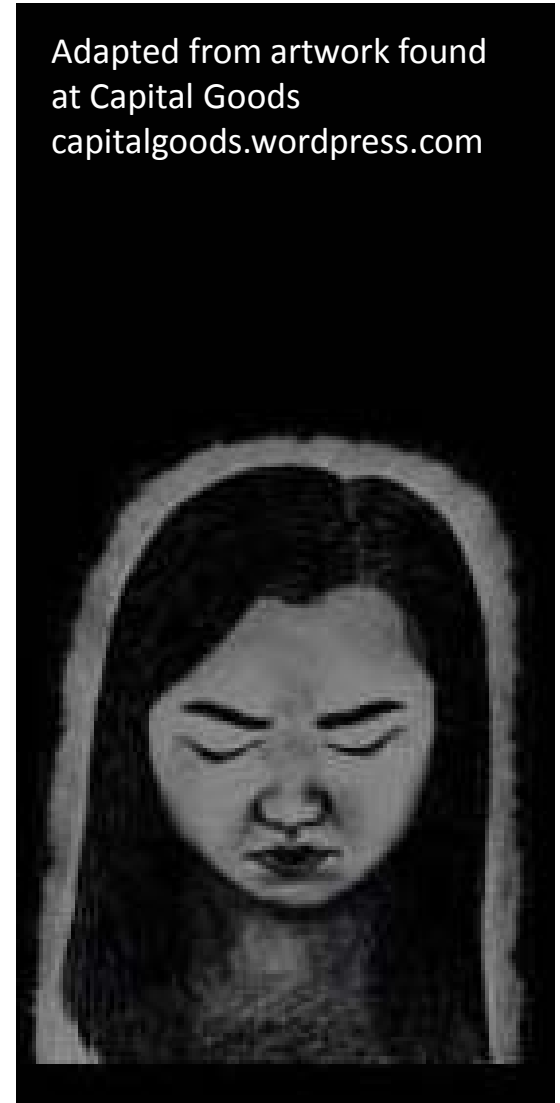
1. Source: SPRE

2. Source: National Institutes of Health

Depression in the Asian American Community

- Asian American students are **more likely** than White peers to report depression symptoms.¹
- US-born Asian Americans are **~3x more likely** to report depression than foreign-born Asian Americans.²

Adapted from artwork found
at Capital Goods
capitalgoods.wordpress.com



1. Kitsch et al 2005
2. Reviewed in Kalobatseva and Leong 2011

Suicide in the Asian American Community

- Asian American women have the **highest** rate of suicide vs. women of all races – at almost all age groups.¹
- Asian American men aged 25-34 or 85+ have the **highest** rate of suicide vs. same-aged men of other races.²
- Suicide is the **8th leading cause of death** for Asian Americans (vs. 10th for non-Asians).²

1. Research of Dr. Eliza Noh, UC Berkeley

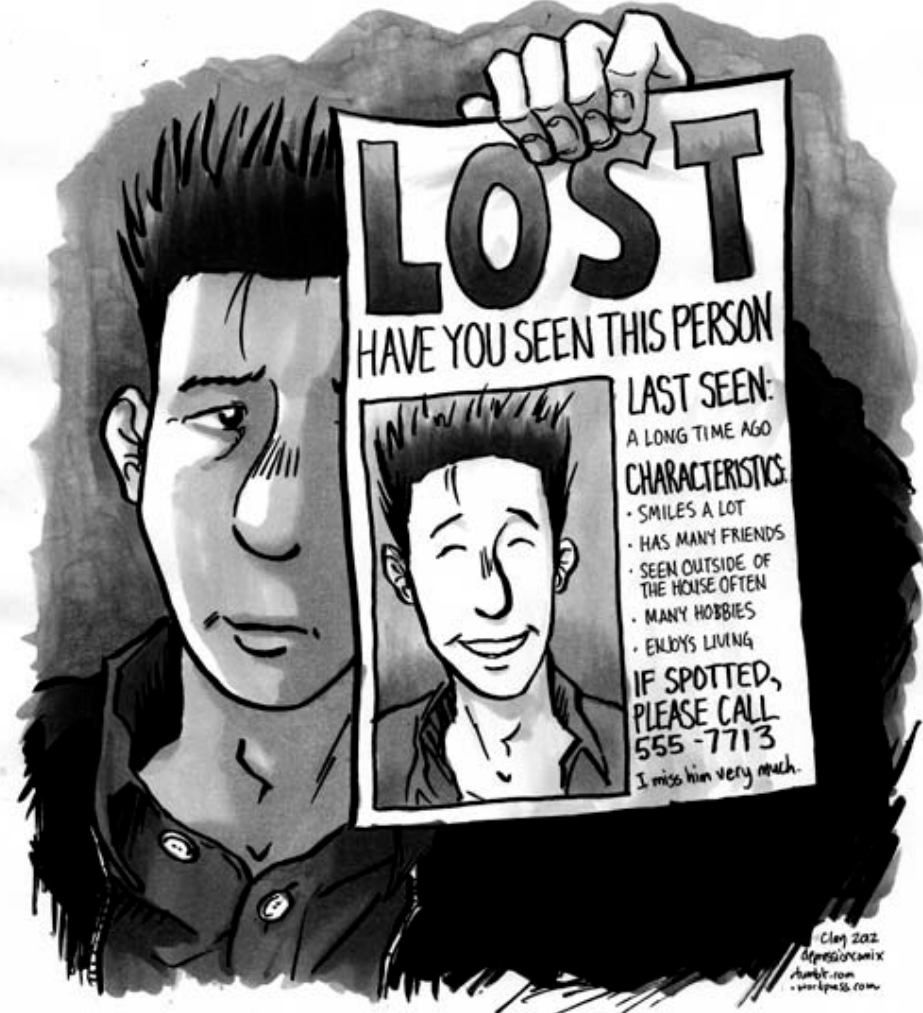
2. Source: National Institutes of Mental Health

SMALL GROUPS: Why do you think depression/suicide higher among Asian Americans?

Art by Depression Comix
(depressioncomix.tumblr.com)

SOME POSSIBILITIES:

- High pressure to succeed?
- Model Minority Myth (stereotype promise)?
- Cultural stigmas?
- Lack of culturally-specific and/or Asian language treatments options?



The Impact of Stigma

- Stigmas over mental illness can lead to:
 - Ignorance / embarrassment of the symptoms
 - Feelings of isolation that exacerbate symptoms
 - Reluctance to seek help

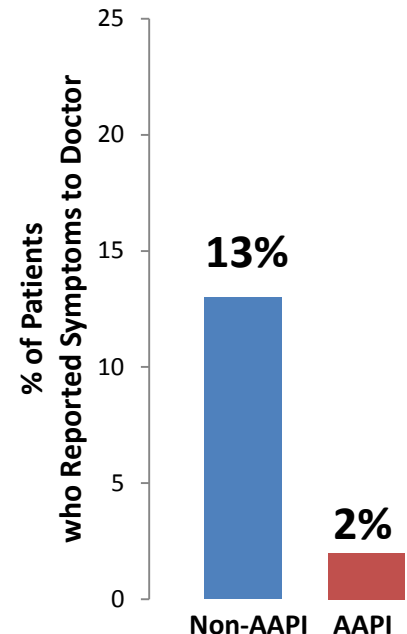
Asian Americans are 50% less likely to report symptoms of depression to others.

Asian Americans are 7x less likely to report symptoms to a doctor.



Suicide is difficult to discuss in any culture, but within the Asian American community it can be particularly difficult to challenge that silence.”

LESLIE ZEITLER
WHOSE MOTHER AND AUNT DIED BY SUICIDE



As a *STUDENT ACTIVIST*: What Can You Do?

- **Start the conversation:**

Organize workshops to **RAISE AWARENESS** about Asian American mental health, depression, and suicide – both on-campus and off-campus – as well as available resources.



We can start by **acknowledging** and **engaging** in dialogue about the pervasive issue of depression and suicide in the APA community.

CAPITAL GOODS
capitalgoods.wordpress.com

- **Build a supportive community:**

Create an Asian American community & **SUPPORT NETWORK** – this helps identify students who may be struggling with depression, which can facilitate early diagnosis and treatment.

- **Improve mental health resources:**

Work with on-campus and off-campus health administrators **IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES** for Asian Americans.

3ATF at Cornell University

- Identified high rate of on-campus Asian American depression/suicide.
- Recommended:
 - Increased education of mental health resources to incoming students.
 - Improved culturally-specific mental health resources for Asian American students.
 - Formation of A3C community centre – which was established in **2008!**

identity.
Asian &
education.
Asian
advocacy.
American
community.
Center
cornell.

All direct results of years of STUDENT **ACTIVISM!**

As a FRIEND or SUFFERER: What Can You Do?

- **TALK**

START A CONVERSATION with friends and family. If you are worried about a friend, talk to them and listen to them – be patient and persistent, not pushy or judgemental.

- **CHECK**

GET HELP by making an appointment with a mental health professional. If you are worried about a friend, let them know about available resources and offer to accompany them when they get help.

- **EMERGENCY**

IF YOU THINK YOU OR A FRIEND ARE IN IMMINENT DANGER: call 911 and do not let the person in trouble be alone.

A FEW DON'Ts:

- **DON'T** ignore possible signs or symptoms in yourself or others.
- **DON'T** feel ashamed or guilty for your depression.
- **DON'T** tell a friend who may be depressed to just “get over it” – they probably can’t by themselves.
- **DON'T** stop your anti-depressant treatments without consulting your doctor, even if you “feel better”.



Art by Kristian Nygård

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Asian American Suicide Prevention & Education
AASPE.net

National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association
NAAPIMHA.org

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention
ASFP.org

ASIAN AMERICAN HEALTH RESOURCES

Asian & Pacific Islander Health Forum
APIAHF.org

Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center
APIAwellness.org

CONTACT JENN

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**FOR EMERGENCY
HELP, CALL**

1-800-273-TALK

**The National Suicide
Prevention Hotline**

More than 150 languages are offered.

1-877-990-8585

Asian LifeNet Hotline

*Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese,
Korean, Fujianese are offered.*