



The Asian American Microaggressions Project

“How Are Microaggressions Against Asian American Teens Reinforced in the School Environment?”

Charles B. Wang Community Health Center

The Charles B. Wang Community Health Center (CBWCHC) is a non-profit, federally qualified health center. Founded in 1971, CBWCHC’s mission is to be a leader in providing quality, culturally relevant, and affordable health care and education as well as advocate on behalf of the health and social needs of underserved Asian Americans.

Teen Resource Center

The Teen Resource Center (TRC) is a pediatric program in the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center (CBWCHC). Founded in 2003, TRC’s mission is to provide information and support to Asian American youth through health education, programs, activities, and referrals.

Community Service Learning Program

The Community Service Learning Program (CSLP) is a paid six month internship in which high school students serve the Asian American community through non-profit community service, professional development, and collaborative social research.

Intern Statement

In order to learn about the types of personal problems that Asian American students face, we conducted a survey to explore the types of support that Asian American students seek out when facing personal struggles. We then incorporated focus groups to determine potential sources of Asian American students’ personal problems.

From our initial research, we learned:

- Asian American students face microaggressions—negative, subtle, and often unintentional remarks based on categories including race, gender, and sexual orientation—which is an overlooked problem in high schools.
- Asian American students primarily turn to peers for support, instead of seeking out trusted adults including guidance counselors and parents.
- Peers are major reinforcers of microaggressions.

Our initial research findings led to our final project question:

How are microaggressions against Asian American teens reinforced in the high school environment?

We hypothesized:

- Asian American students who face microaggressions do not call attention to the concern of microaggressions because they do not think that it is a “big deal”.
- Students are uncomfortable seeking personal support from trusted adults because they believe that adults, especially guidance counselors, are only concerned with their academic problems.

Research Findings

Research Methods

- **Paper survey** (51 teens)
- **Two focus groups** (16 teens)
- **Interviews** (2 focus group participants, 6 professionals)
- **Content Analysis** (see resources)

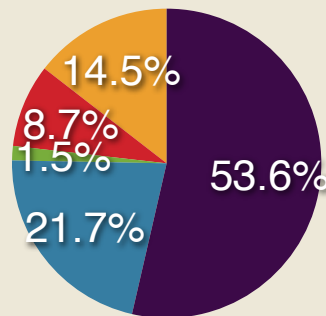
Total Surveyed:

Male: 35
Female: 16

Grade Level:

College Freshman: 3.8%
High School Senior: 30.8%
High School Junior: 42.3%
High School Sophomore: 15.4%
High School Freshman: 7.7%

Who do you go to the most when you have personal problems?



- Friends
- Family
- High School Guidance Counselor
- Other
- No One

Focus group participants and expert interviewees said:

- “Teachers should communicate with their students and try to find their problems. Teachers should encourage the students to be who they want to be.”
- Being a “teenager is a time when they absorb a lot of things and try to set up their own identity.”
- “MMM (Model Minority Myth) is based off stereotypes and comes from it. We are burdened with these stereotypes because we have to fill the obligation of being the model minority.”
- “Teens who feel they can’t survive under school expectations either become withdrawn or rebellious in attempt to cope with the challenge.”
- “If I speak out, I am depicted as mean. If I am quiet, I appear more respected.”
- “I would feel the need to do drugs if my friends were doing it just to fit in.”

Analysis

- Microaggressions that stem from stereotypes (such as the Model Minority Myth) inaccurately portray the identities of Asian American high school students (in terms of social behaviors, sexual health, and party culture).
- Misconceptions of Asian American high school students develop because microaggressions and stereotypes are a rare conversation topic.
- Trusted adults and Asian American high school students perceive microaggressions to be harmless.
- Asian American high school students are pressured to meet the many, often conflicting expectations of being an “Asian American high school student”.
- Asian American high school students’ interests, hobbies, behaviors, and decisions are unconsciously influenced by microaggressions. For example, an Asian American high school student would feel reluctant to participate in certain school activities, such as student government or the arts, mainly because these activities don’t reflect the commonly perceived image of an Asian American high school student.

To Overcome Microaggressions, We Can:

- Be informed about the role of microaggressions in teenagers’ lives.
- Participate in programs or initiate campaigns to spread awareness about important teen issues such as the role of microaggressions in a teen’s life and provide support if needed.
- Approach and talk to trusted adult figures (family, school faculty, mentors, and mental health experts) when experiencing problems.
- Encourage peers and students to explore diverse cultures and allow better understanding of different ethnicities.
- Help to fund and foster pre-existing institutions that provide Asian American students with education services and youth development opportunities.

Meet the Interns

Ryan Kong is a rising junior at Stuyvesant High School who aspires to be a doctor or a zoologist.

Sunny Zhong is a rising sophomore at Stuyvesant High School who aspires to be a pediatrician.

James Wang is a rising junior at The Brooklyn Latin School who loves public speaking.

Eslam Alnagar is a rising sophomore at Brooklyn Technical High School who loves to play basketball.

Kevin Ou is a rising freshman at Binghamton University. He has no idea what he wants to be when he grows up but he likes putting smiles on people’s faces.

Nanxi You is a rising senior at Hunter College High School. She is an aspiring architect, a laughter, and a walking contradiction.

Sharon Chan is a rising junior at Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School who thinks that she smiles way too much.

Jefferson Bai is a rising senior at the Bronx High School of Science. He is pursuing a health related career.

Resources

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