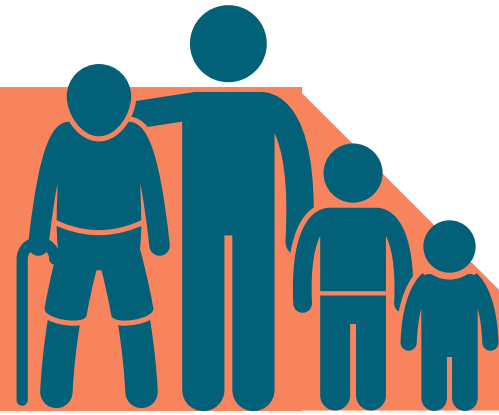


Research-Based Tips & Insights for Content Creators: Storytelling for Asian American Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing

CENTER FOR
SCHOLARS &
STORYTELLERS



Asian American Experiences: Intergenerational Conflict



#1

Depict Asian American (AA) youth balancing collectivist and individualist values across different settings.

WHY? Collectivist values can be more common in the AA family setting. However, AA youth may adapt to the more individualist values in peer and school settings. This clash can lead to a disconnect within an individual.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: In *Turning Red*, Meilin Lee, a Chinese Canadian, struggles to balance the individualist values of her friends with the collectivist values of her family. This coming-of-age story demonstrates how Meilin, her mom, and her grandmother find ways to resolve their intergenerational conflict.



What is intergenerational conflict?

Conflict of values between different generations often stemming from a disconnect or changes in cultural values and environment.

What is individualism? The cultural value most common in **Western** cultures that prioritizes individual well-being over group well-being.

What is collectivism? The cultural value most common in **Eastern** cultures that prioritizes group well-being over individual well-being.

What is the "Model Minority Myth"? This portrays AAs as having a good work ethic, being obedient and non-complaining, and having a high socioeconomic standing, which marginalizes AAs who do not fit this stereotype.

Did you know...

Cultural marginalization is caused by the tension between values based in Western culture and values based in Asian cultures. Greater cultural tensions between AA parents and teens are associated with **increased AA teen depressive symptoms.**

Stories about communication and the navigation of these tensions can promote wellbeing within families.

Kim et al., 2006

#2 Show characters whose self-worth and societal acceptance is derived from sources apart from familial honor, academic success, or conformity.

WHY? The model minority myth places a constant burden on AA youth to succeed (e.g., academics) and reflects only a singular narrative. Its unrealistic expectations can clash with individual desires, leaving many AA youth feeling inadequate and psychologically conflicted.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: In *The Baby-Sitters Club*, the Japanese American teenager Claudia Kishi's popularity and strong sense of self is derived from her friendly personality and artistic nature, despite having academic struggles. This show **unpacks her journey towards expressing herself artistically, allowing her to find an identity separate from the benchmarks of traditional academic success.**



Quick Checkpoint

Have you considered AA youth stories that reflect authentic, diverse experiences of intergenerational and social interactions with family and peers?

They could include experiences of...

✓ Complex family relationships

✓ Conflicts in values

✓ Racial/Ethnic identity development

✓ Challenging the model minority myth



Intersectionality in Asian American Youth Identities



What is intersectionality?

The combination of a person's interacting identities that co-exists to shape their experience with privilege, discrimination, and/or oppression. Some examples of intersectionality in the AA community include mixed race AA, AA LGBTQ+ community, AA with disabilities, etc.

#3 Show the impacts of AA youth in diverse economic settings.

WHY? AAs have the highest income inequality (i.e., wealth disparity between the rich and poor) out of all racial groups in the US. Portray AA youth from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds and how they are differently impacted.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: The AA adolescent male character Steven Conklin from *The Summer I Turned Pretty* struggles with external perceptions of financial security, social class, and assumed stereotypes by his peers and older white characters. However, this story positively portrays a **young man internally navigating his identity and social standing by confronting his differing financial status, navigating paying for college, and creating positive experiences with what he has been given.**

#4 Show AA LGBTQ+ characters embracing their sexuality and culture.

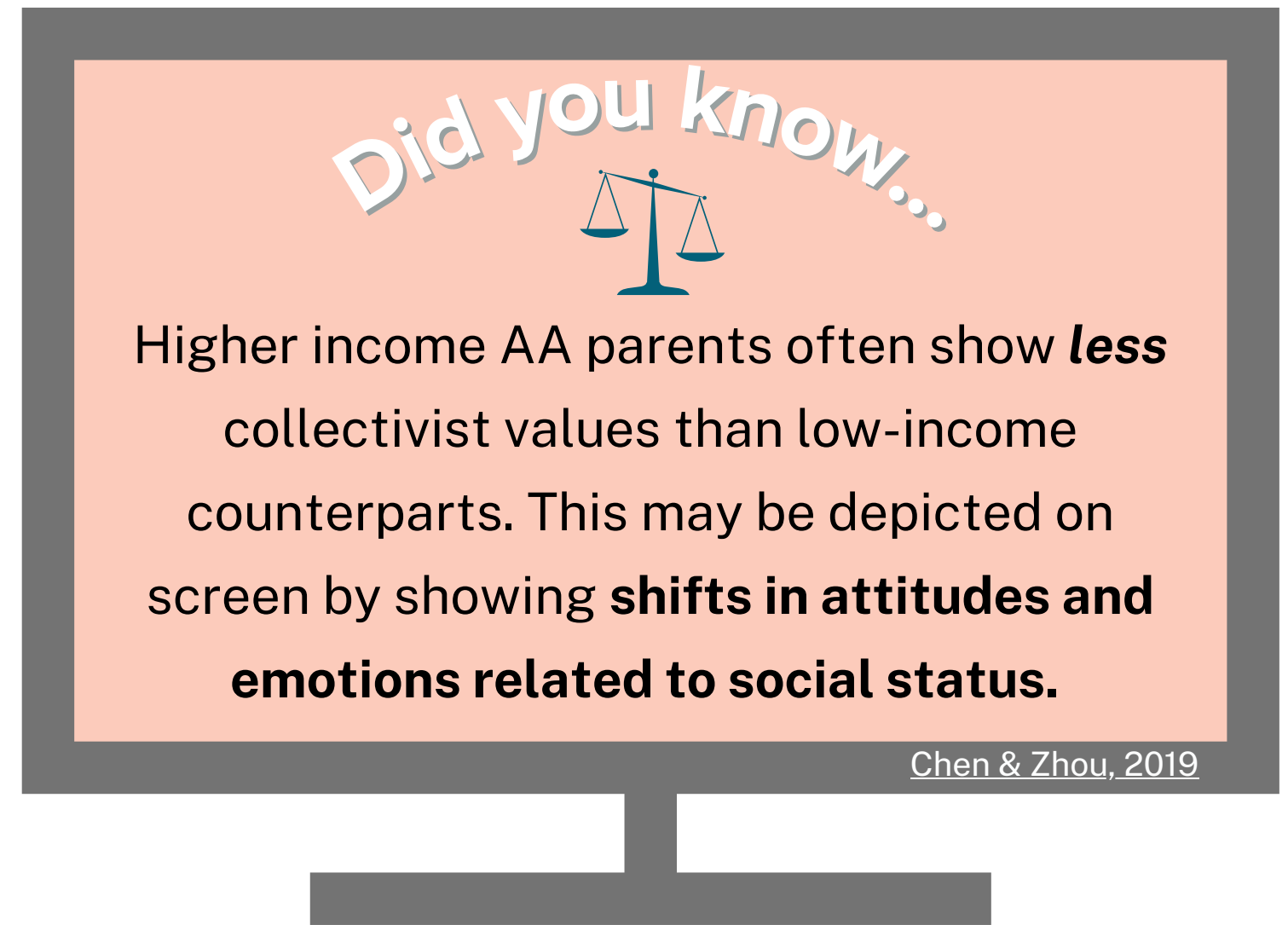
WHY? Tween and teen years are a time of expansive identity formation. Young AAs who also identify as a member of the LGBTQ+ community may find fewer positive examples of AA LGBTQ+ characters to look up to, which is shown to exacerbate feelings of alienation and struggles with mental health.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: In the coming-of-age story, *The Half of It*, Ellie Chu struggles to find her identity in a small town as one of the only Chinese American students. Ellie's feelings of alienation are amplified when she finds herself falling for the most popular girl in school. As a LGBTQ+, first-generation AA teen, Ellie feels like an outsider until she finds the strength to accept herself, aided by the support of her new friend. **With few examples of intersecting communities, it is important to portray authentic experience of building AA LGBTQ+ communities for teens.**

#5 Show the acceptance and inclusion of AAs with disabilities by their families, friends, and peers.

WHY? AAs with disabilities often feel invisible in their own communities, leading to greater mental distress than AAs without disabilities.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: In the Pixar short *Float*, a Filipino American father **tries to hide his son's neurodivergence from other children, but ultimately, the father embraces him for who he is.**



Quick Checkpoint

Have you considered portraying AA youth characters who are exploring their intersecting identities? This often shapes their experiences with discrimination and/or privilege and wellbeing. Asian American youth identities to explore are...

- ✓ Gender identity
- ✓ Sexual orientation
- ✓ Multiethnic identity
- ✓ Family economic status
- ✓ Immigration status
- ✓ Disability

Did you know...



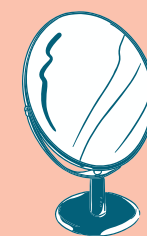
AAs are **60%** less likely to receive mental health treatment as compared to their non-Hispanic white counterparts. This is, in part, due to familial and cultural stigma.

HHS, 2018

Asian American Ideals of Beauty and Appearance



Did you know...



AA college students report **higher levels of body dissatisfaction** and negative attitudes toward obesity than their non-Asian, BIPOC peers.

ANAD, 2019

#6 Avoid perpetuating stereotypes that marginalize young AA males by framing them as emasculated or undesirable.

WHY? Young AA males are often unrealistically held up to Western standards of beauty and appearance. Those who internalize "Western ideals of beauty" in media have higher levels of social comparison and greater stress assimilating to Western culture.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: The Indian American character Des from *Never Have I Ever* is presented as both a **popular teenager and a love interest**. The lead Devi Vishwakumar is drawn to Des because they both bond over navigating their shared **Indian American bicultural identities**.



#7 Show a range of AA body types and appearances that are accepted by their surrounding communities.

WHY? Tweens and teens become increasingly self-conscious about body image and eating behaviors, which can be influenced by family and close friends. AAs are often portrayed as having only one specific idealized slender body type, minimizing the range of body types that exist.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: An example of a character who is comfortable with their body type is Russell from Pixar's *Up*. With so few examples, **especially for teen girls**, it is important to show aspirational AA youth characters of various body types. Positive examples can include a **family who is supportive of a relative's body type without making jokes or negative comments**.

Biculturalism

among AA youth is often **protective** against effects of stress. Portrayals of youth exploring two cultures (i.e., US and Asian heritage) can foster positive youth development.

Chueng & Swank, 2019

#8 Portray AA youth characters with a variety of skin tones as desirable while acknowledging the harmful presence of colorism in AA communities.

WHY? In AA communities that privilege light skin, especially among young AA women, skin color can be a symbol of socioeconomic status.

EXAMPLE IN THE MEDIA: The show *Sex Education* features Olivia Hanan, a teenage Indian character who is introduced as one of the mean popular girls in high school. Olivia's storyline as she **navigates high school and adolescence embraces her as both dark-skinned and desirable**.



Quick Checkpoint

Are your characters representative of the range of body types that exist in society? Or do they all adhere to the white Eurocentric beauty standards of masculinity for men and slimness for women? Ideals of beauty or appearance to explore are....

- ✓ Physical appearance
- ✓ Toxic masculinity
- ✓ Public persona
- ✓ Photoshop/Filters



About CSS:

The Center for Scholars & Storytellers (CSS), at UCLA, collaborates with leading scientists to provide research-based insights for content creators crafting authentic and inclusive stories for children (ages 2-9) and adolescents (ages 10-25).

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About CAPE:

CAPE (Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment) advances representation for Asian American and Pacific Islander creators and executives in Hollywood.



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Research Sources

Cheah et al., 2013; Espiritu, 2007; Hasnain et al., 2020; Javier & Belgrave, 2019; Jones, 2013; Keum, 2016; Kim et al., 2006; Le et al., 2021; Nomaguchi & House, 2013; Pew Research Center, 2018; Qin et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2007; Yoo et al. 2010

Special thanks to The Jed Foundation