

ELEVATING PERSPECTIVES:

Bullying and Adjustment Experiences of Chinese American Youth

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NASP Paper Presentation, Thursday February 20th 2025

AGENDA OVERVIEW

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02

Theoretical Framework

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Study 1 - Quantitative

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Study 2 - Qualitative

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School Implications

BACKGROUND

BULLYING VICTIMIZATION & OUTCOMES

- **Bullying victimization** is exposure to intentional, systematic, and recurrent harmful behavior that results in an imbalance of power (Olweus, 1994)
 - Verbal, social/relational, physical, and cyberbullying
 - *Prevalence varies, but around 16-28% (Leburn-Harris et al., 2019)
- **Bullying victimization** has been consistently linked to **poor mental health and academic outcomes**
 - Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem
 - Challenges with interpersonal relationships
 - Low academic engagement
 - Outcomes can differ by type of bullying

References: Desjardins & Leadbeater, 2011; Troop-Gordon et al., 2015



BACKGROUND

WHY ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH?

- **Anti-Asian hate crimes** have elevated risk of bullying victimization and mental health challenges (Patchin & Hinduja, 2022)
 - Asian American Bullying Survey Report (2021) - **80% of Asian American youth experienced bullying**
 - Chinese American youth targeted by COVID-19
- **Decreased help-seeking** among Asian American victimized youth (Asian American Bullying Survey Report, 2021)
 - 38% of Asian Americans told an adult vs. 63% of non-Asian American youth
 - Saving face and maintaining family honor



BACKGROUND

WHY ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTH?

- Asian American youth experience **high levels of internalizing symptoms, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts yet underutilize mental health services** (Huang et al., 2012; La Salle et al., 2017)
- **Dangers of the Model Minority Myth** - invisibility of struggles
- **Need to disaggregate AAPI data**
 - Chinese Americans are largest and fastest-growing group of adolescents in US (Pew Research Center, 2021)



Angelica Ordóñez

Bullying Victimization



**Maladaptive Outcomes
(e.g., anxiety depression)**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1986)

- How individuals make sense of events in their lives
- Attributions shape emotions, behaviors, and self-perception
- Three key dimensions:
 - Locus of Control: Internal vs. External
 - Stability: Stable vs. Unstable
 - Controllability: Controllable vs. Uncontrollable



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Behavioral Self-Blame

Internal, **unstable**, and **controllable**

Characterological Self-Blame

Internal, **stable**, and **uncontrollable**

SELF-BLAMING ATTRIBUTION EXERCISE

Emily, a 14-year-old student, was assigned to work in a group for a science project. During the project, her group members often ignored her ideas and talked over her. When the teacher asked the group to present, the group gave her the smallest speaking role. Later, Emily overheard one of her group members say, “She’s too quiet anyway.”

SELF-BLAMING ATTRIBUTION EXERCISE

Behavioral Self-Blame

Emily thought: *"Maybe I should have spoken up more. Next time, I'll make sure to say my ideas early on."*

In this case, Emily sees the situation as something she could change by adjusting her behavior.

Characterological Self-Blame

Emily thought: *"I'm just too quiet. No one ever listens to me because I'm not interesting."*

Here, Emily internalizes the experience as a reflection of a fixed flaw in herself.

Which of these attributions do you think would lead to greater distress over time?

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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bullying Victimization

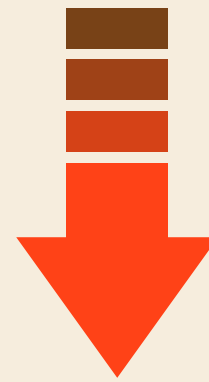


**Maladaptive Outcomes
(e.g., anxiety depression,
low self-worth)**

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Characterological Self-Blame

(uncontrollable, stable)



Bullying Victimization



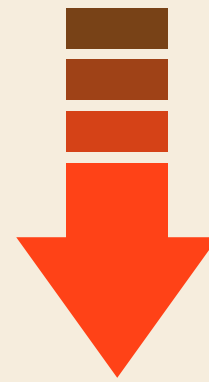
Maladaptive Outcomes
(e.g., anxiety depression,
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THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Characterological Self-Blame
(uncontrollable, stable)

*Asian American youth more likely
to attribute bullying to
**uncontrollable causes such as
cultural and language difference
and physical appearance***

Bullying Victimization



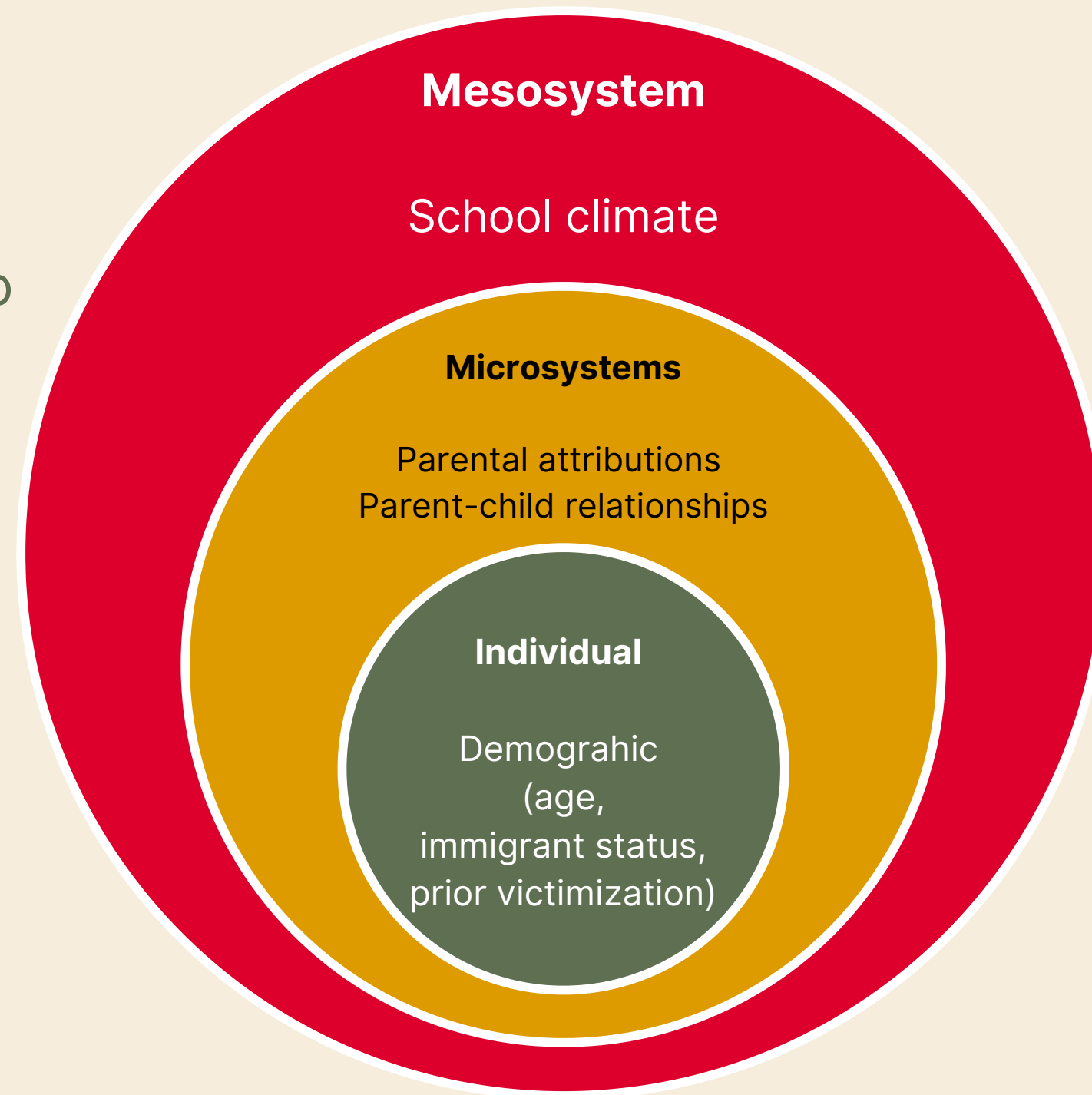
Maladaptive Outcomes
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What factors influence the development of attributions to bullying?



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What factors influence the development of characterological and behavioral attributions to bullying?



Ecological Systems Model (Bronfenbrenner, 2006)

STUDY 1

QUANTITATIVE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1

How do **individual factors** (immigrant status, gender, grade) and **ecological factors** (parent communication and school climate) influence Chinese American youth's attribution styles?

RQ2

How does **bullying victimization interact with self-blaming attribution** to influence mental health outcomes among Chinese American youth?

METHODS



- Chinese American Resilience Study (CARS) a longitudinal, multi-method research project aimed at understanding the risk and resilience factors affecting the well-being of Chinese American adolescents and their parents during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - 3rd wave survey was collected online from May to July 2024, with 230 participants
 - ages 10 to 23 years ($M = 16.24$, $SD = 2.54$)

MEASURES

- **Bullying Victimization** - Delaware Bullying Victimization Scale - Student (Bear et al., 2014)
 - Verbal, Social, Physical, and Cyberbullying
- **Attribution to Bullying Victimization** - Attributional Questionnaire (Graham & Juvonen, 1998)
 - Characterological and behavioral self-blame
- **Mental Health Outcomes** - Youth Internalizing and Externalizing Scales (Renshaw & Cook, 2018)
- **Demographic** - age, grade, gender, English language status, generational status
- **School Climate** - Delaware School Climate Survey-Student (Bear et al., 2014)
- **Family Communication** - Family Problem Solving Communication Index (McCubbin et al., 1988)

All scales validated for sample with CFA, had adequate reliability, and examined for multicollinearity

ANALYSIS

RQ1

How do **individual factors** (immigrant status, gender, grade) and **ecological factors** (parent communication and school climate) influence Chinese American youth's attribution styles?

Regression models to examine predictors of the two types of attribution styles

- Model 1 - Demographic factors
 - Whether certain dem. factors were associated with tendency to engage in characterological or behavioral self-blame
- Model 2 - Add family communication and school climate, while controlling for demographic factors

RESULTS RQ 1

Demographic Influences on Attribution Styles

- None of the demographic variables was significantly associated with characterological or behavioral self-blame

Contextual Influences on Attribution Styles

- **School Climate**
 - Significant predictor of characterological self-blame but not behavioral self-blame
 - Positive perceptions of school climate associated with lower levels of internal, stable self-blame
- **Parent Communication**
 - Not significantly associated with either attribution type
 - Potential reasons - saving face, filial piety

ANALYSIS

RQ2

How does bullying victimization interact with self-blaming attribution to influence mental health outcomes among Chinese American youth ?

Moderation analysis to examine whether characterological and behavioral attributions moderate the relationship between different types of bullying victimization (verbal, social, physical and cyber) and mental health outcomes (internalizing and externalizing)

****Results will only focus on characterological self-blame****

ANALYSIS

RQ2

How does **bullying victimization interact with self-blaming attribution** to influence mental health outcomes among Chinese American youth ?

Characterological Self-Blame



Bullying Victimization
(Verbal, Social, Physical, Cyber)



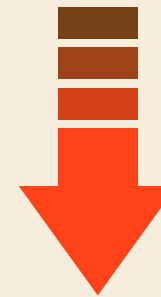
Mental Health outcomes
(Internalizing & Externalizing)

KEY RESULTS RQ 2

Moderating Role of Characterological Attribution

- Characterological attribution significantly moderated the relationship between **verbal bullying and internalizing symptoms**
 - Only significant at high levels of characterological attribution, not at low levels

Characterological Self-Blame



Verbal Bullying Victimization



Internalizing Symptoms

KEY RESULTS RQ 2

Moderating Role of Characterological Attribution

- Characterological attribution significantly moderated the relationship between **cyberbullying and externalizing symptoms**
 - Significant at low and high levels of characterological attribution

Characterological Self-Blame



Cyberbullying Victimization



Externalizing Symptoms

KEY RESULTS RQ 2

Moderating Role of Characterological Attribution

- **Verbal bullying victimization** - Verbal bullying directly challenges a person's self-concept
 - More likely for victims to internalize the negative messages and attribute the bullying to their own perceived flaws
- **Cyberbullying** - More anonymous or impersonal; pervasive

Why not...?

- **Relational bullying** - Often perceived as driven by external social dynamics rather than personal traits. Victims may blame the social group or bully
- **Physical bullying** - Direct act of aggression by perpetrator, likely to be attributed to bully's behavior



STUDY 2

QUALITATIVE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Study 2 RQ1

How do Chinese American bully victims make sense of why they were bullied in adolescence?

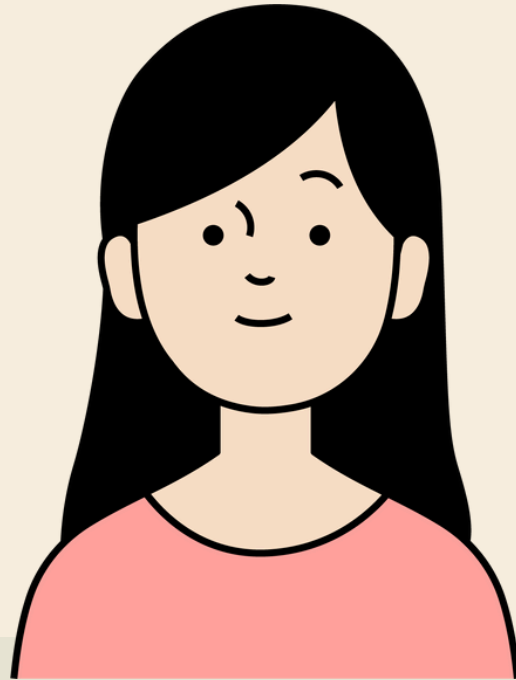
Retrospective accounts of Chinese American young adults who experienced bullying victimization in secondary school with the aim to get a deeper understanding of what influenced development of characterological self-blaming attribution

METHODS

- From survey pool, selected 7 participants who...
 - Ages 18-24, currently in college
 - Experienced bullying victimization**
 - Had high attribution styles on survey response
- Conducted 60-minute semi-structured interviews
 - Participants asked to discuss how they made sense of bullying victimization
- Compensation - \$25 Amazon gift card
- Analysis
 - Thematic analysis and pattern-matching strategy across all 7 interviews
 - Highlight 3 results - overlap

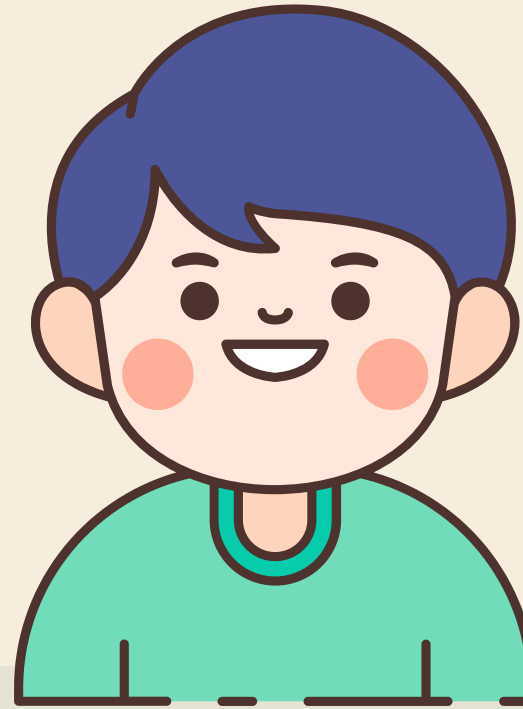
CHARACTERS

*pseudonyms used to protect identities



Quinn

- 19 years 6 months
- Female
- Grew up in SF
- 2nd year UC School
- 1.5 gen immigrant, moved to US at 11 years old
 - Former English Learner
- Bullied in middle school
 - Verbal and relational bullying
- Low self-esteem, social anxiety especially in big groups



Ethan

- 18 years 6 months
- Male
- Grew up in SF
- 1st year UC School
- 2nd gen immigrant
- Bullied in middle school
 - Verbal and relational bullying (name calling and left out)
- Low self-esteem, overly critical of himself, peer comparison

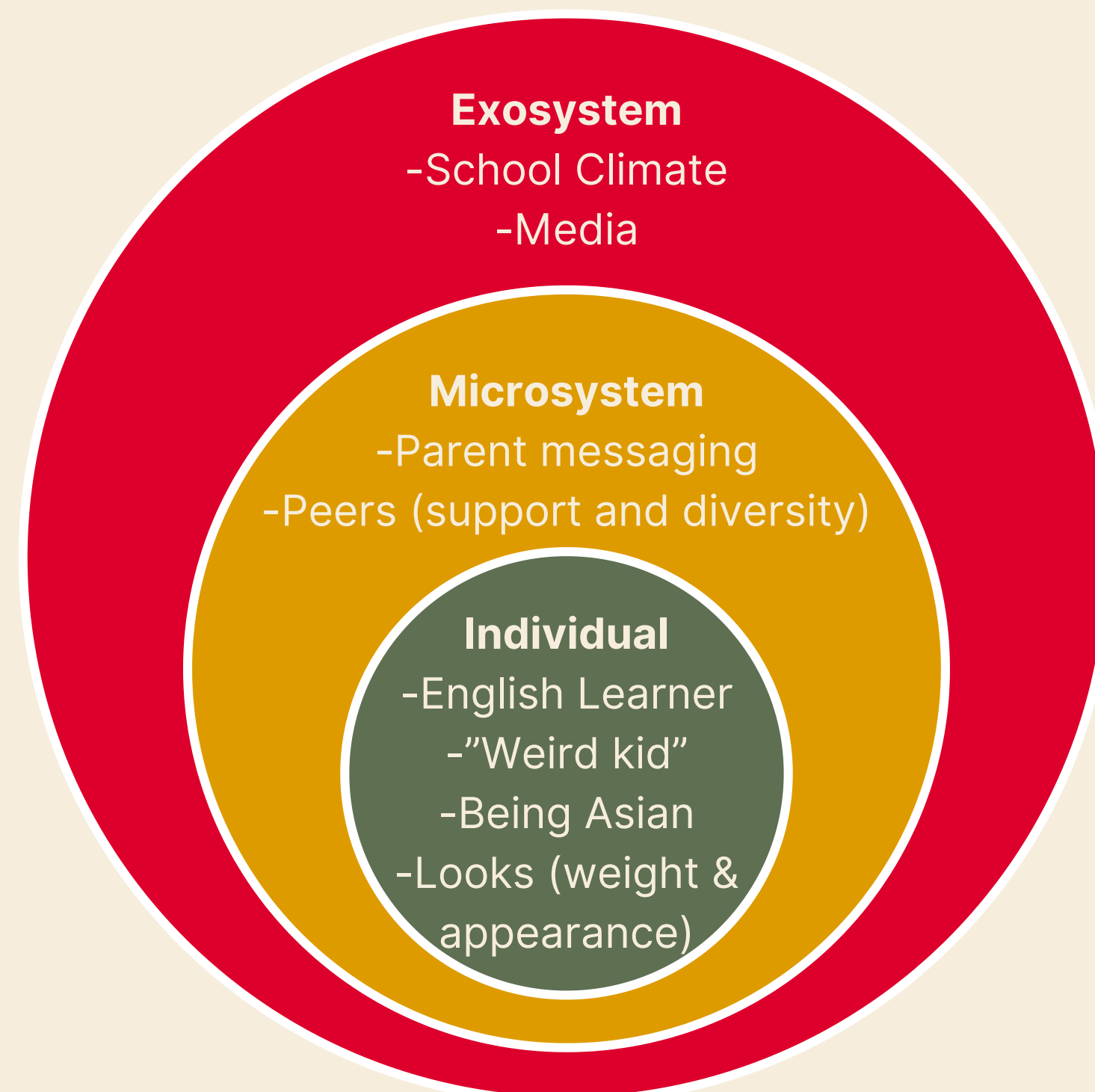


Maggie

- 21 years 8 months
- Female
- Grew up in Bay Area
- 3rd year UC School
- 2nd gen immigrant
- Bullied in high school on sport team
 - Verbal and relational bullying
- Anxiety, panic attacks, fear of judgment from others

RESULTS

Factors that influenced attribution to bullying victimization



KEY QUOTES - PARENT INFLUENCE

“My mom in the beginning, she was kind of skeptical....she said, **“Oh, it's just all in your head.”** And I think that kind of worsened it a little bit. Just because I was like, okay, **then why is this happening to me all the time?** But I think when I was really really at my lowest I think I said like hey, mom, I don't think it is just in my head. And I think she finally understood that. **Her words did affect me in a more negative way even though she was trying to support me,** but I think after we went to see the doctor and after we kind of talked about medication and stuff like that, **she kind of did her own research on what could be the best way to support me. And so she changed her language on how to support me and stuff like that. I think that's what really helped me accept the way that I am and the way that I think.”**



Maggie

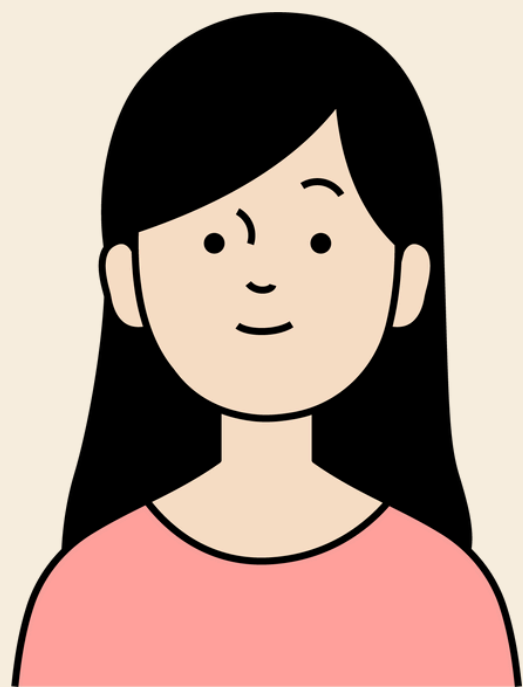
KEY QUOTES - SCHOOL CLIMATE

“I think for high school, at least, **when you're in a system of bullying, you don't really realize that it's bullying.** I think in middle school, we had a talk about bullying and obviously that was just, if someone is like physically hurting you then do something. **And I didn't realize that bullying could also mean verbally and mentally disrupting your life.** And I think for high school, it was just like, **okay, I'm living in this and nothing's changing,** even though I'm trying to do the best that I can...**that really affected the way that I thought because I just didn't realize it wasn't just me”**



Maggie

KEY QUOTES - MEDIA

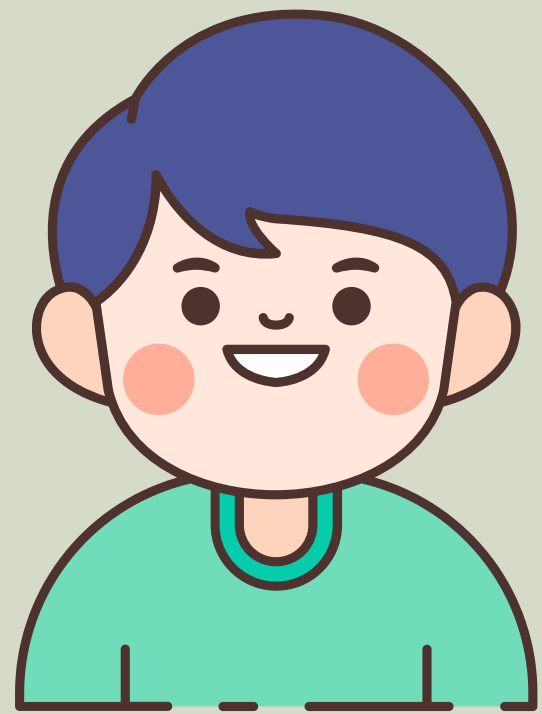


Quinn

"I don't think there were a lot of Asian representation in the media. And if there was, it was very stereotypical. So I couldn't really relate to a lot of characters. I think they were just either White or just they were cartoons. Especially with bullying, I think a lot of Disney shows that I watched as a kid, it was a lot of White characters with the token Black or Asian, side character. It was like, oh, they're the funny ones. Like maybe I need to be **the funny one in the friend group**, or whatever. And so it was just like **they don't show the sadness of the world**. They just show what they think we go through. And therefore, what, I guess, **my thought process in high school and middle school was just like, I should be more like those people**. And I'm like, **my life isn't really supposed to happen like that**. What I'm going through right now, **no one really talks about it. Maybe all of it is in my head, and it's not real.**"

POST TRAUMATIC GROWTH

- Victimized youth reported to have developed greater empathy and want to offer social support to others



Ethan

“I think just being there for other people now, and **just knowing what I went through, and knowing that I can share my knowledge of how I went through it**, and hopefully, that it'll benefit my friends or someone else...being a good advocate for the way that I can listen and how to listen to people, in times of need, and just being there for them, but not fixing it. **Because I don't think realizing it now like, I couldn't fix anything back then. I can't fix other people.** I can't read other people's minds, you know, it's just your own. **It's just your own mentality that you can change.** And I think just being an advocate for that, and helping other people who are going through that, just realize that **it is possible to change and you just kind of have to** double down and find your support group.”

SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS

Individual Level Implications

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Reframing Negative Attributions**
 - Teach self-blaming students to reframe verbal bullying in a way that does not internalize it as a character flaw; consider external factors
 - Instead of: "I'm just a weird person, that's why they call me that."
 - Reframe: "They are saying mean things, but that doesn't define who I am"
- **Culturally responsive mental health support**
 - Asian American students may downplay distress and might need indirect ways to discuss emotions (e.g., storytelling, journaling, metaphor-based interventions)
- **Post-traumatic growth**
 - Instead of focusing solely on distress, also explore growth to empower students
 - "How have you changed since this experience?"
 - "What advice would you give someone else in your situation?"

SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS

Family Engagement

- **Provide culturally competent parent workshops** on bullying, self-blame, and mental health, since some families may see bullying as something a child should “tough out”
- Help **parents recognize when internalizing distress** is a concern and encourage open family dialogue about emotions
 - Youth Mental Health First Aid for diverse families
 - Parents opening the dialogue may be especially important for Chinese American youth with cultural values of filial piety and saving face

SCHOOL IMPLICATIONS

School-wide Implications

- **Fostering positive school climate**

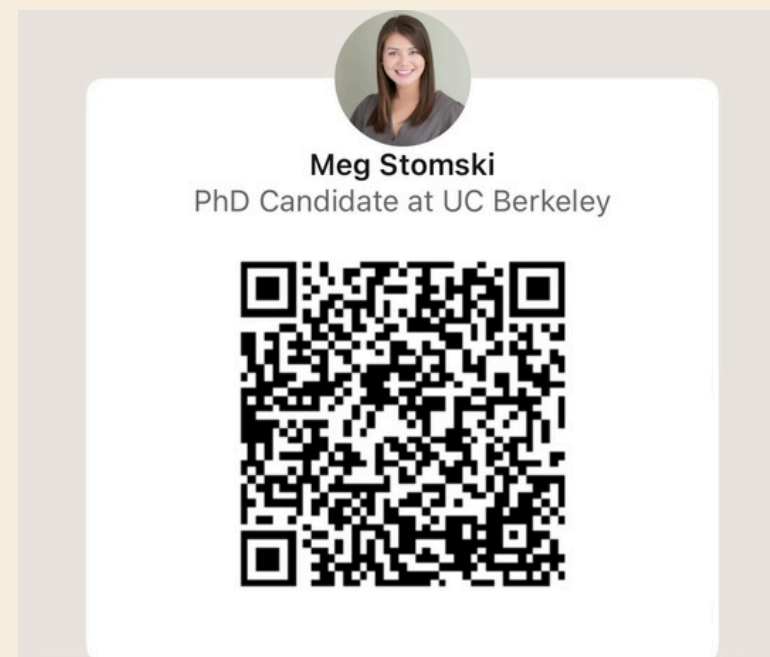
- School-wide bullying prevention and intervention programs include psychoeducation on all types of bullying (verbal, physical, relational, cyber)
- Embracing diversity at the whole school level to reduce development of internalized self-blame
- Importance of calling out bullying to decrease normalization of bullying
 - As soon as possible, hold restorative conversations

- **Importance of representation (e.g., disability, race/ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation), especially in bullying programs and SEL curriculum**

- In books, teaching examples, SEL curriculum etc.
- Incorporate Asian American perspectives into school-wide anti-bullying discussions
 - e.g., Address the stereotypes in verbal bullying (e.g., “all Asians are quiet/smart” or Model Minority Myth) and how they impact self-perception

ANY QUESTIONS?

Thank you! Please do not hesitate to reach out to me at
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Acknowledgements:

To the 230 Chinese American adolescents and young adults who participated in my study, especially the 7 who completed the survey and interviews, this research could not have been possible without you!

Dr. Chunyan Yang, for your continuous support with my dissertation!