This chapter focuses on the history, identity, and psychology of Asian Americans and suggests curriculum materials and teaching strategies to bring this information into the psychology classroom. The terms Asian American and Asian Pacific American refer to individuals from at least 40 separate and distinct ethnic groups, speaking 40 different languages, from more than 20 countries (Zhan, 1999). Although these groups are often categorized together—because of their common ethnic origins in Asia or the Pacific, because they have some similarities in physical appearance, and because they are presumed to share common values—they actually comprise a very diverse and heterogeneous population. Each ethnic group has its own language(s), values, customs, and unique experiences of migration to the United States. There are, in addition, many individual and group differences even within what would be considered the same ethnic group.

On the other hand, although Asian American cultural values and behaviors have rarely been studied empirically, many writings and anecdotal reports do in fact describe similarities among Asian American groups (Uba, 1994). Some of these can be traced to the common values shared by their cultures of origin, loosely based on Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist phi-
losophies, which stress harmony with others, putting family and group needs ahead of individual needs, and fulfilling expected familial and societal roles. In addition, many Asian immigrants and Americans of Asian descent have experienced similar group histories of oppression in this country, as well as similar effects of racism, which remains a deeply embedded aspect of U.S. society. There are also new perspectives on Asian American psychological issues, offered in several recent books: Uba (2002) challenged existing paradigms of knowledge as they relate to Asian American psychology, Hall and Okazaki (2002) provided a framework for the conceptual and methodological development of Asian American psychology, and Chin (2000) looked at Asian American women's relationships in cultural context.

A BRIEF IMMIGRATION HISTORY OF ASIAN GROUPS IN THE UNITED STATES

A brief history of Asian ethnic groups in the United States can provide students with a background for understanding Asian Americans' psychological issues. There have been several different waves of immigration (L. C. Lee, 1997; Takaki, 1989), each producing cultural and political forces that continue to resonate today in the lives of Asian Americans.

The First Immigrations: 1840–1924

Historian Sucheng Chan (1991) pointed out that by the time the Chinese were recruited to immigrate to the United States, in the 1840s as laborers and in the 1860s as railroad workers, "color prejudice had become . . . a habit of heart and mind" (p. 45) for European Americans, who had already pushed aside, enslaved, and subjugated indigenous peoples, Africans, and Mexicans. Considered too "foreign" in their physical appearance, their customs, and their language to be accepted as Americans, the Chinese were the first nationality in U.S. history to be barred from immigration. Other discriminatory legislation allowed only Chinese men and not women to immigrate (an attempt to ensure that the Chinese did not produce families and settle in the United States), forbade marriage between Chinese and Whites, forced Chinese to live in Chinatown ghettos, and excluded Chinese and other Asians from becoming naturalized American citizens (L. C. Lee, 1997; Takaki, 1989).

In the 1880s, the Japanese settled in Hawaii and the West coast region of the United States mainland to work on plantations and farms. Anti-Japanese sentiment, similar to that directed at the Chinese, led to acts of physical violence against the Japanese (S. Chan, 1991). In 1907, the Gentlemen's Agreement, signed with Japan, restricted the numbers of Japanese allowed to immigrate. However, many Japanese immigrant men married quickly before
the door shut, often arranging “picture-bride” marriages by mail, and by 1920 there were more than 130,000 individuals of Japanese ancestry living in the United States, primarily on the West coast and in Hawaii. These immigration patterns—of recruiting men from an Asian ethnic group to come to the United States as laborers, prohibiting women and family members from joining them, and excluding them from obtaining legal immigration status—were repeated, in smaller numbers, for Koreans and Filipinos during the period between 1903 and 1920 (S. Chan, 1991).

**Immigration and Restrictions, 1924–1965**

The 1924 Immigration Act severely limited immigration from all Asian countries until 1965 (S. Chan, 1991). After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, there was a period of strong anti-Asian sentiment, focused on the Japanese but also touching many individuals from Asian backgrounds. Although some Asians had lived in the United States for as long as 50 years, they were still regarded by other Americans as potential enemies—unlike European immigrants whose countries of origin were also at war with the United States. More than 110,000 Americans of Japanese ancestry were forced from their homes and confined for up to 3 years in “internment camps,” which were little more than tent cities with subsistence barely provided. When World War II ended, they were released from the internment camps and dispersed across the United States; many who tried to return to their homes found their property had been appropriated, especially on the West coast (Takaki, 1989). There are personal accounts of the internment camp experience (e.g., Houston & Houston, 1973; Okada, 1976; Weglyn, 1976), and several films offer a moving lesson about institutionalized prejudice on a large scale, including the feature movie Snow Falling on Cedars (Bass & Baum, 2000) and the documentaries Children of the Camps (Ina, 1999) and Unfinished Business: The Japanese Internment Cases (Okazaki, 1986). In addition, some of the Japanese American writers, filmmakers, and activists who lived through the internment experience are still alive, and guest lectures on these topics can be particularly compelling.

In 1952, with the end of the Korean War, the McCarran-Walter Act was passed, allowing Asians to become naturalized citizens—and thus reversing more than 100 years of exclusion from the American political process. Japanese, Korean, and Filipina wives of American soldiers were allowed to enter the United States as nonquota immigrants, although only a very small quota of other Asians were afforded the same privilege (S. Chan, 1991). However, in 1965, spurred by the moral imperative of the civil rights movement in the United States, Congress finally passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act, abolishing national origins quotas. As a result, between 1965 and 1975 the Asian American population increased dramatically; in particular, many Koreans, Indians, Chinese and Filipinos settled in the United States.
New Immigrants and Refugees: 1975 to Present

Over the last 25 years, nearly 1 million Asian refugees have arrived in the United States, mostly from Vietnam, and the rest from the neighboring countries of Laos and Kampuchea (formerly Cambodia). The Vietnam war played a large role in creating this refugee exodus. After waging a ground and air war (including dropping well over 2 million tons of bombs on Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam), the United States withdrew from Vietnam in 1973, leaving many South Vietnamese supporters of the United States in great danger. When Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos fell to Communist control in 1975, those who managed to escape did so amid terror and horrendous violence and endured arduous stays in refugee camps. First-person Vietnamese accounts of the war and refugee experience are provided in _When Heaven and Earth Changed Places_ (Hayslip, 1989) and _South Wind Changing_ (Huynh, 1994). Other military conflicts, and a genocidal campaign by Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, created another exodus of refugees. The feature film _The Killing Fields_ (Putnam & Smith, 1984) tells the stories of Cambodian refugees who escaped after torture and imprisonment.

Asians currently are the fastest growing immigrant group in the United States; the Asian population nearly doubled in size during the 1980s and 1990s. The 2000 U.S. Census reports that people of Asian heritage number almost 12 million, or about 4.2% of the total U.S. population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

TEACHING ABOUT ASIAN AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES

There are many aspects of the Asian immigrant and Asian American experience that would be appropriate to include in a course on Asian American Psychology or that could be integrated into developmental, social, personality, clinical, or psychology of women courses. I next discuss three important topics—cultural influences, minority group status, and refugee adaptation—that would suit either purpose.

Cultural Influences in Asian American Psychology

Whereas it is important to make students aware of the great diversity within and among the many Asian American ethnic groups, some generalizations can be made about common values, beliefs, and customs that they may share. These cultural ways may help shape personality, behaviors, communication style, interpersonal relationships, sexuality, and gender role expectations.
Importance of the family

Perhaps the most obvious difference between Asian and American cultures is the importance of the family (Liu & Chan, 1996). Whereas the traditional U.S. marriage is based on romantic interest between a couple, with continuing intimacy and open communication, Asian marriage is based on the desirability of the union to both families. The Confucian ideal for families is to be tightly knit, with close, ongoing contact with extended family members, including cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. The ideal family is led by two heterosexual parents who care for their own elderly parents and who have established clear rules and discipline for their children. Women are expected to take care of domestic needs and to be nurturing, family oriented, and home centered. Men are expected to be dominant, strong, stoic, and family oriented, but also worldly. Parents generally are not openly affectionate, either physically or emotionally, with each other, or with their children, but demonstrate the strength of their relationship through their sense of responsibility to each other and to their children. Respect, order, hierarchical authority, and duty (Dion & Dion, 1993; Liu & Chan, 1996), in which communication is indirect or inferred through behavior, is the norm within the family. Family expectations form the foundation for Asian cultural values of proper behavior.

Whereas non-Asian American parents work toward supporting their children's growth and eventual independence, with the expectation that adult children will create their own separate families and lives, many Asian parents expect their children to be living with them or nearby, as part of their lives, until the parents die. Obedience to parents' wishes, even if individual desires run counter to them, and respect for elders and for authority figures, are strong cultural expectations (Chiu, 1987; Uba, 1994). These rules may govern career decisions, geographic location of residence, and even choice of mate. Non-Asian advisors and counselors are often surprised when Asian or Asian American college students are willing to choose a major to satisfy their parents, often in an area viewed as good for employment, such as accounting, or engineering—even if they are passionate about another discipline. A recent example I encountered was a male college student, originally from Korea, who sought counseling from me because his father expected him to go to Korea after graduation to find a bride. He already had a girlfriend here in the United States and was torn between his desire to fulfill his family's cultural expectations and his desire to keep the relationship with his non-Korean girlfriend. He was also expected to live with or near his parents once his education was completed.

Levels of acculturation

To understand the psychology of Asian Americans, it is important to know something about their level of acculturation, which is not necessarily
correlated with length of time in they have been in the United States. Some Asian Americans who represent their families’ third or fourth generation in this country may still hold very traditional Asian cultural values, whereas more recent immigrants may be acculturated quickly into American culture and life. It is ironic that more recent immigrants may hold traditional values less strongly and be more “Westernized” in styles and customs, because of the almost universal exposure to Western goods and ideas through English-speaking media and the globalization of industry into previously isolated Asian countries (C. S. Chan, 1995).

On the other hand, wide variations can exist within the same family. One sibling, often the eldest, may retain a more traditional cultural role than the others, and levels of acculturation can even vary greatly between parents, particularly if only one is working outside the home. The parent or child(ren) who has greater contact with American society may serve the role of introducing other family members to mainstream American customs and behaviors; however, they may also conflict with relatives who maintain Asian cultural customs and behaviors closely.

Behavior and communication style

Asian Americans are often unaware of particular cultural characteristics in their personality, behavior, or communication style, attributing differences they may have from non-Asian peers to individual or family characteristics rather than to Asian cultural influences. These cultural differences may in fact be so subtle that they are not recognized as such even by therapists working with Asian American clients.

An important cultural value of Asian Americans is the precedence of group needs over individual interests. Because interpersonal harmony is considered to be essential, Asian American individuals will often take a conciliatory role in group discussions. They may appear to be accommodating, conforming, and well mannered rather than being confrontational or drawing attention to themselves. Whereas this behavior usually reflects a desire to avoid conflict, it is often mistaken as unassertiveness or submissiveness—and in the classroom, it may be viewed as a sign that a student does not know or understand the material or is less competent. This communication style can be even more pronounced among Asian American women, who may have absorbed voice-muting messages from both Asian and American cultures.

The ability to communicate indirectly by getting a message across without having to directly confront or embarrass the other person is highly valued. If a subject is difficult to talk about openly, such as sexuality, then Asian Americans may communicate in an indirect manner so that it is understood by both parties but never needs to be openly stated. For example, if an Asian American woman wanted to know if her brother knew that she was a lesbian and in a relationship with another woman, she might not discuss it openly but might hint at it. She might tell her brother that she would be spending

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a weekend with her partner. Then he might mention that he had heard that it was a romantic place and a good weekend getaway location. That way, he would be communicating his understanding of the relationship to his sister without having to openly address the issue in conversation.

Another example of indirect communication involves allowing a friend the opportunity to create social boundaries that are comfortable for both parties. If an Asian American woman wanted to find out if she would be welcome to stay at a friend's home for the weekend in another city, she would not ask the friend directly. A direct request could put the friend in the awkward position of having to decline if a stay were not convenient or desired. Instead, an Asian American might ask, “I am coming to your town next month. Can you suggest some reasonably priced hotels?” This would allow the potential host the options of offering her home or offering suggestions for hotel accommodations. In this manner, both guest and host maintain interpersonal harmony, avoid conflict, and are both able to save face (Bond, 1991).

The desire to avoid conflict and interpersonal discomfort often results in constrained expression of emotions and avoidance of conversational topics about which disagreement might arise. Many Asian Americans are reluctant to reveal feelings or personal problems, even to a therapist. This avoidance is especially pronounced in family discussions, where there is commonly little open and honest communication between generations because of an understood desire for the appearance of harmony among all.

Public displays of emotion are particularly discouraged; Asian Americans consider it a virtue to be able to contain their feelings, hiding them until they are alone, and thus avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others (Carlin & Sokoloff, 1985). They generally consider it best to convey emotions through a written message. That way, both the sender and the recipient can experience and express their feelings in private and avoid any risk of public exposure.

To respect the importance placed on avoiding conflict and embarrassment, and allowing all parties to save face, Asian Americans are often taught to be observant of subtle social cues, both verbal and nonverbal. A great deal can be communicated through nonverbal means, including a quick look of disapproval from parents to children, or a lingering look in which one person might hold the contact of another eyes for just a second longer. This very subtle form of nonverbal communication can often indicate emotional or sexual interest and can be easily missed by the casual observer (C. S. Chan, 1995).

Effects of Minority Group Status

The psychology of Asian Americans is influenced not only by their own historical and cultural backgrounds but also by their minority group status
in the United States. As an ethnic minority group, they may experience marginality, because their values, customs, and behaviors differ from those of the majority culture. They are also likely to be affected, psychologically, by non-Asians’ perceptions of them and by the stereotyping and racism that exist within the dominant culture, which occur in a variety of forms.

The struggle to be American

One form of racism Asian Americans encounter is to be persistently regarded as foreigners, no matter how long their families may have lived in the United States, and how assimilated they may be. Many Asian Americans, while acknowledging some cultural influences from their Asian background, identify primarily with mainstream U.S. culture. Thus it is a shock when the outside world, seeing their racial characteristics, perceives them as other than American. It is not uncommon to be asked where they are from, how long they have lived in this country, and to be told that they speak very good, unaccented English—when indeed, English is their native language and their families have lived in the United States for decades. Asian language, customs, religions, foods, family structure, and culture are all perceived to be foreign and distinct from the European-based U.S. culture. Although the United States prides itself on being a melting pot of many cultures, Asian Americans are perceived as still not blending into the mix.

The myth of the model minority

The most prevalent forms of racism targeting Asian Americans today are more subtle than the laws of the past that restricted immigration, housing, and employment. Nowadays, their perceived success may, ironically, be used as a justification for discrimination. Often labeled the “model minority,” they are viewed as having “made it” in the United States, because of the purportedly low rates of mental disorders and high levels of education, household income, and occupational status among some Asian Americans. However, a low rate of mental health services use may not indicate a low need for mental health services (Uba, 1994), and a higher average family income may be due to the fact that more Asian American family members are in the workforce than in the overall population. In college admissions, the perception that Asian American students are an ethnic minority group that does not require special consideration has sometimes led to lower rates of acceptance of Asian American students at prestigious universities. Between 1983 and 1986, several leading universities acknowledged discriminating against Asian American applicants and using quotas and ceilings to limit the enrollment of Asian Americans (Takagi, 1992).

Moreover, the model-minority argument is based on an assumption of homogeneity among Asian American groups (Uba, 1994) and does not take into account the disparities between those who have been in the country for
decades compared to those who have arrived recently. Although some Asian American ethnic groups, particularly those who have been in this country for longer periods of time, have a strong record of academic achievement in the United States, there are others who have far lower levels of achievement than their non-Asian peers.

Furthermore, even when educational achievement has led to occupational success, there is often a glass ceiling beyond which Asian Americans are not promoted or perceived as leaders, whether in business and industry or higher education. For example, despite the large number of Asian Americans in colleges and universities, a 1989 survey found that they occupied only 1% of executive or managerial positions in American higher education (Escueta & O'Brien, 1991). Income levels for both immigrant and U.S.-born Asian Americans are not as high as would be expected given their educational levels, indicating discrimination in promotion and salary compensation (Barringer, Takeuchi, & Xenos, 1990; Uba, 1994).

Stereotypes and racial slurs

Subtle racism and stereotyping are often sources of stress for Asian Americans because even a high socioeconomic level or education cannot protect them. Upper middle class Asian American professionals may find that although they are viewed as competent technicians or researchers, they are perceived as quiet and lacking leadership qualities and thus not promoted to managerial positions. Stereotypes of Asian Americans as hardworking and uncomplaining may lead to exploitation—more work without compensation or promotion. In schools and university settings, Asian American students are frequently perceived as quiet but diligent students who “raise the curve” in math and science classes. Such stereotypes not only arouse resentment among non-Asian peers but also perpetuate the notion that whereas Asian American students are good technicians, they are not verbal or creative, which may narrow their opportunities (Takagi, 1992). An accumulation of experiences with racial discrimination, whether overt or subtle, can over time create a sense of bewilderment and frustration. Individuals who are aware of these subtle slights may be able to develop a wide range of adaptive responses, but others may develop feelings of helplessness and lowered self-esteem (Uba, 1994).

Asian American women have had to endure several forms of stereotyping on the basis of their race and gender. One, which characterizes them as diligent, unassertive, and submissive, derives from the historical lower status and subservience of women in China and Japan (True, 1990). Another, which implies that Asian women have an exotic sexiness or sexuality, is based on the Japanese geisha model as well as the similar, but more diabolical model of the manipulative “dragon lady” (Tajima, 1989). Still another, of the hardworking, quietly efficient laborer, reflects the limited employment
opportunities that were historically available to Asian American women as garment workers, domestics and, more recently, as technicians and researchers. The last stereotype is that of the "lotus blossom baby"—the fragile, attractive "Suzie Wong" prostitute type—who has also become the subject of pornography (Tajima, 1989). This stereotype developed primarily as a consequence of the most recent American wars fought in Asia, where American soldiers' primary contact with Asian women was with prostitutes, and later as a consequence of the mail-order bride business, in which men from America and other western countries paid large sums of money to be matched with an Asian woman pictured in a catalog (Brownmiller, 1975; C. S. Chan, 1987). Such stereotypes of sexuality may lead some men to assume that Asian American women are more available and will not complain or reject them, thus making the women more vulnerable to unwanted advances and sexual harassment (Uba, 1994). The documentary Slaying the Dragon (Gee, 1988), a historical perspective of the media's portrayal of Asian American women in film, provides an excellent illustration of these stereotypes.

Refugee Experiences: Stress and Adaptation

It is particularly useful for students in clinical and counseling psychology to learn about the experiences of the southeast Asians who have immigrated to the United States in recent decades, many of whom were refugees from political violence or military conflict. Their issues are complex. For many, in addition to handling the usual economic, cognitive, and emotional challenges involved in adapting to a new language and culture, as well as the racism that targets people of color in the United States, they have had to deal with the psychological effects of the traumas they experienced before leaving their homeland. These traumas have included seeing family members killed, having bombs dropped literally in their own backyards, and living with daily terror, as well as enduring stays in refugee camps and coping with the uncertainties of resettlement in the United States (Kinzie et al., 1990). Researchers have found that Cambodian refugees have been affected to the greatest extent because of the genocide and executions by the Khmer Rouge, which killed up to one third of the population (Mollica et al., 1990). Posttraumatic stress disorder is high among the Cambodian population in the United States, as many refugees continue to experience delayed psychological effects of their war trauma, including survivor guilt, nightmares, and depression.

Thus, unlike other immigrant groups, southeast Asians refugees have often relocated to the United States because they had no other choice, facing torture, rape, starvation, or imprisonment in their home countries. In addition to their many losses, they have faced many stressors in this country, including difficulty learning English, culture shock, unemployment, racism from Americans who harbor negative feelings about the Vietnam war, and a variety of health problems resulting from conditions during the war years.
and in the refugee camps (Mollica, Wyshak, & Lavelle, 1987). Given their experiences, many southeast Asian refugees and their families are at higher risk for mental and physical problems.

**Underutilization of Mental Health Services**

Although Asian Americans in general are vulnerable to psychosocial stresses because of their cultural differences and minority group status, psychological problems appear to be more prevalent among foreign-born immigrants (particularly refugees) than among people of Asian descent born in this country (Uba, 1994). However, despite the need for mental health services within both groups, research has shown that Asian Americans have generally not used such services in proportion to their numbers in the population (Sue, 1977). Asian cultural values, which emphasize stoicism and discourage expression of feelings, contribute to this underutilization. In addition, the absence of linguistically and culturally appropriate services in many areas limits outreach to Asian American communities. Ng (1998) and Hong and Ham (2000) have provided useful resources that recognize these challenges and offer information and suggestions for understanding and counseling Asian Americans.

**TEACHING STRATEGIES WITH ASIAN AMERICAN STUDENTS**

The cultural values discussed in this chapter have implications for Asian Americans in classroom settings. First, because the course instructor is likely to be a stranger with no relationship to the students and no sense of trust yet established, Asian American students may be extremely wary about expressing personal feelings. Thus, they may not participate in discussions involving personal disclosure, even of what may seem to be minor information to the instructor—or they may do so with great discomfort and then drop the course. The fear of shaming the family and losing individual and family honor may also hinder Asian Americans from disclosing any personal information in a classroom setting. In addition, group exercises may be uncomfortable for them, because they are likely to feel responsible for group harmony at the expense of their own input or control over the final product.

Given the importance of privacy and saving face, Asian American students may also opt to remain silent about difficulties with class materials or personal problems that are interfering with their performance. Or, problems and concerns may be expressed as psychosomatic difficulties, such as insomnia and stomach pains. Within Asian cultures, it is more acceptable to seek relief if one has physical ailments than if one has psychological problems such as anxiety or depression (E. Lee, 1988; Owan, 1985; Uba, 1994). For
many Asian Americans, there is also a belief that feelings, particularly negative ones such as sadness, anger, guilt, or shame, should be controlled by the individual and that expressing them to others is a sign of weakness of character. Developing insight into one’s psychological well-being and evaluating one’s feelings are not viewed as admirable or even helpful.

Instructors can create more effective and culturally sensitive classrooms if they allow time for Asian American students to become comfortable; make an effort to establish a trusting relationship with them; avoid exercises that demand public discussion of emotional or personal issues; and provide some structure in discussions, perhaps by being more directive in their questions. Other structured options that can facilitate effective communication include journal entries, to which the instructor writes responses that students can review in private, and homework assignments that give students explicit permission or instruction to pay attention to their emotional or personal reactions to material and to record these feelings on paper. However, such journals or assignments should not be shared with others without permission of the student.

Another useful assignment is for students to interview their parents and other elders, to learn the story of their family’s immigration to the United States, thus providing a sociohistorical context for understanding their own development. This assignment can be used with all students, to enable them to learn about their family’s background; if they are from a family that immigrated long ago, they can compare their family’s experience with that of a newer Asian immigrant’s family. Another assignment might involve going to an Asian American community organization and interviewing individuals about their immigration experiences. The objective of these assignments is to provide some hands-on experience, to make the material on Asian American cultural issues and immigration relevant and alive for all students regardless of cultural background. A further approach is to use some of the many memoirs, novels, and films that address Asian themes, such as The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Childhood Among Ghosts (Kingston, 1976), The Joy Luck Club (novel by Tan, 1989; video produced by Wang, 1994), The Wedding Banquet (Hope, Schamus, & Lee, 1994), and Picture Bride (Mark & Onodera, 1995).

CONCLUSION

Although the number and diversity of Americans of Asian descent continue to grow, there is little available psychological research on Asian Americans overall, and even less on specific ethnic groups. Most of the research has been conducted on Japanese and Chinese Americans, although there is beginning to be a focus on southeast Asians, Pacific Islanders, and south Asians. There is a great need to understand both the diversity and the
commonalties among and within the Asian American ethnic groups and to integrate this understanding into the psychology curriculum. It is important to provide an educational environment in which students from Asian backgrounds feel acknowledged and accepted and in which students from other backgrounds can come to understand and value the diversity of Asian American experiences in their historical and societal contexts.

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