

# Risk and Resilience Among Asian American Youth: Ramifications of Discrimination and Low Authenticity in Self-Presentations

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This study examines adjustment patterns among a group neglected in developmental science—Asian American students in high-achieving schools. National reports have declared such schools to connote risk for elevated problems among teens. Asian American students are commonly referred to as model minorities, but little is known about adjustment issues within academically competitive settings, specifically. Guided by past research on culturally salient issues, multiple U.S. high schools were examined to (a) determine areas of relative strength versus weakness in adjustment of Asian Americans compared with Whites, and (b) more importantly, to illuminate salient within-group processes related to Asian Americans' well-being. Risk modifiers examined were perceptions of ethnic discrimination, parent perfectionism, internalized achievement pressure, authenticity in self-presentation, and closeness to school adults. Outcome variables included depression, anxiety, and isolation at school. Results demonstrated that Asian Americans fared better than Whites on anxiety and school isolation, but with low effect sizes. By contrast, they fared more poorly on almost all risk modifiers, with a large effect size on discrimination. Regression results showed that among Asian Americans the most consistent associations, across cohorts and outcomes, were for discrimination and authenticity. Findings underscore the need for greater recognition that discrimination could be inimical for students not typically thought of as vulnerable—Asian Americans in high-achieving schools; these issues are especially pressing in light of increased racism following coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). Results also suggest that feelings of inauthenticity could be a marker of generalized vulnerability to internalizing symptoms. Implications for future theory and interventions are discussed.

## Public Significance Statement


Among Asian American students from six high-achieving schools (HASs), this study illuminated two factors consistently linked with high depression and isolation at school: Exposure to discrimination, and tendencies to keep their “true selves” invisible in everyday life. Results call for increased attention to diversity, equity, and inclusion issues among Asian American HAS students, along with other groups of ethnic minority youth who are commonly (and appropriately) cited as vulnerable to systemic racism.


**Keywords:** Asian Americans, discrimination, resilience, COVID-19, adolescence

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**Suniya S. Luthar**

I stand in the aisle of the school bus while the other seventh graders snicker and block me from sitting next to them, as they have for the entire school year. Taking my seat next to the bus driver, I look out to the road with resignation. My great-aunt, adorned in a colorful sari, waves goodbye to me while the entire school bus looks on. I want to disappear into the dingy brown vinyl bus seats. With the newfound cruelty of adolescence, I scoff and loudly tell my classmates, "That crazy lady is just my maid."

—Jilani, 2020

This article is focused on risk and resilience processes in a group little studied in developmental science thus far: Asian American adolescents in high-achieving schools (HASs). National policy reports have declared that HAS students generally show elevated risk for serious adjustment problems—especially internalizing symptoms—as a result of ongoing achievement pressures. There has been little research on adjustment patterns among ethnic minority groups at these schools, and in this study, the focus is on adjustment patterns and processes among Asian American students in particular.

### **High-Achieving Schools: Psychological Adjustment Among Asian American Students**

A comprehensive consensus study report on childhood equity from the National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine (NASEM, 2019) named students at HASs as an at-risk group, given high, ongoing pressures to achieve. These are schools with good standardized test scores—with average SAT scores at the 75th percentile and

higher (see Luthar, Kumar, & Zillmer, 2020)—potentially representing at least a quarter of high school students in the United States. HAS youth were included in the NASEM (2019) report along with several others traditionally considered vulnerable, including children with incarcerated parents, those in foster care, and those in deep poverty (see also Geisz & Nakashian, 2018).

Thus far, there has been little attention to ethnic minority youth in HAS settings; the studies that do exist have been with African American adolescents and show still further vulnerability. Assari et al. (2018) found that compared with their counterparts in lower socioeconomic status (SES) settings, African American students in relatively affluent school communities reported significantly higher levels of depression. Findings were interpreted as arising from greater feelings of discrimination in high SES schools, where there are relatively few youth with an ethnic background similar to theirs.

In a similar way, Asian American students in HASs may be especially vulnerable, and particularly to internalizing symptoms and low belongingness at school. In general, Asian American youth more often manifest internalizing problems than externalizing ones (Lee et al., 2009; Mistry et al., 2016; Warikoo et al., 2020; Yip et al., 2008). With regard to feelings of belonging, the widespread minority stereotype sets them apart from the White majority peer group as having greater commitment to academics, conformity to adults' rules, and emotional reserve as opposed to expressiveness (Kim & Lee, 2014; Shen et al., 2011). From a curricular perspective, even in schools that value diversity and inclusion, Asian American experiences and challenges are not explicitly recognized (Ngo, 2006).

Studies have, in fact, shown links between perceived discrimination among Asian Americans and mental health problems, especially depression (Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Kiang et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2009). To illustrate, Gee et al. (2007) compared the top and bottom quartiles of perceived discrimination among Asian Americans, and found that the probability of having a depressive psychiatric disorder increased by as much as 169%; the parallel probability increase for anxiety disorders was 93%. In an important new study considering sleep indices as outcomes, Yip and colleagues (2020) showed that Asian American youth can experience the ill-effects of discrimination and racism as much as other youth of color. When considering generalizability of effects across ethnic groups, it should be acknowledged that some White students also perceive discrimination—for example, based on views that gains among minorities result in disadvantages to Whites (Craig & Richeson, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2017), but it is unclear whether this exacerbates personal distress to the same degree as it does among individuals of color.



Ashley M. Ebbert

### Contextually Salient Socializing Influences

In studying resilience in nonmainstream groups, researchers' emphasis is on vulnerability and protective processes—that exacerbate and ameliorate risks, respectively—that are *contextually salient*, likely to be especially important in the group under study (Luthar et al., 2000). Among U.S. teens growing up in relative affluence, an exemplar of such contextually salient constructs is parent “containment” of substance use or anticipated parental repercussions on detecting their use of drugs or alcohol. Within affluent suburban communities, parents often see adolescent substance use as normative and are somewhat lax about it. Findings have shown robust, inverse associations with students' self-reported use of drugs and alcohol in high school, with serious long-term repercussions (see Luthar, Kumar, & Zillmer, 2020).

Analogously, the goal in this study was to examine socializing processes likely salient among HAS teens from Asian American backgrounds, and in addition to discrimination, four constructs were examined in relation to internalizing symptoms (to which they are especially vulnerable). Two of these constructs were related to academic pressures, that is, perceptions of overly high parent expectations and internalized pressures for success. Another two were related to transparency and comfort in sharing personal issues, as opposed to a preference for privacy. The rationale for selecting these constructs and their operational definitions are described next.

### Posited Vulnerability and Protective Indices: Prior Evidence

Asian American parents place a high value on education, sometimes to an excessive degree. These parents tend to view higher education as a pathway for upward mobility, and some see their children's academic and career success as a reflection of family honor (see Kodama & Huynh, 2017; Kwon et al., 2017). Children's risk for depression and anxiety can become elevated when they perceive parental expectations are overly high, as in the colloquialism “tiger parenting” reflecting harshness, strictness of rules, and disproportionate emphasis on academic success as opposed to social-emotional well-being (Kim et al., 2013).

Aside from perceptions of parents, it is possible that Asian American students' own internalized achievement pressures may exacerbate risk for distress. To illustrate, ongoing exposure to model minority stereotypes can lead to internalization of societal expectations, heightening problems such as depression and somatization (Tummala-Narra et al., 2019). Similarly, among Asian American families, conversations about children's accomplishments can be commonplace, and ongoing community comparisons can elicit feelings of shame and guilt among students who do not achieve at levels of peers (Kodama & Huynh, 2017). In view of these findings, this study included perceived *parent perfectionism* and *internal pressures* to achieve among risk-modifiers examined.

Aside from achievement pressures, another contextually salient issue for Asian American youth is an emphasis on personal privacy—about one's mental health issues, or attributes about the family or culture. These students often contend with expectations to become “racially innocuous” and to know their “place” in their communities, conforming to the customs, values, and norms of the White majority (Liu et al., 2019, p. 144). Such conformity expectations are heightened in predominantly wealthy and White communities, and often carry significant psychological costs, including feelings of anxiety and depression (Garcini et al., 2017). Youth of color tend to scan settings and situations wherein they can safely be themselves, as the “Vietnamese American child quickly realizes through bullying in the cafeteria that a ham and cheese sandwich is preferable to fried fish and rice” (Liu et al., 2019, p. 147). In view of this literature, in this study we examined the degree to which students' private selves were congruent with the self they presented in everyday life, that is, self-reported levels of *authenticity*.

Cultural norms on keeping one's personal and family problems private may also engender attenuated help-seeking. As Shea and Yeh (2008) noted, Asian cultures tend to emphasize emotional restraint, avoiding shame, and saving “face,” in contrast to Western norms valuing emotional expressiveness and self-disclosure. Additionally, some traditional Asian cultures suggest that mental health problems



**Nina L. Kumar**

from failures to control oneself (Lee et al., 2009); leading to stigma and embarrassment around help-seeking (Fogel & Ford, 2005). As a result, Asian American youth in distress may hesitate to seek help from school counselors or faculty advisors (Lee et al., 2009). A fourth risk-modifier considered here, therefore, was students' reports of close, *supportive relationships with adults* at their schools.

#### **Analytic Approach: Seeking Replicated, Robust Associations**

From a design standpoint, this study included multiple school cohorts toward ascertaining generalizability of findings. In research on little-studied groups, the use of the same measures and methods across distinct studies allows for conceptual replications of results, lending greater credence to links than those documented in a single sample (Maner, 2014; Stroebe & Strack, 2014). Such replication of findings is valuable in helping to formulate future *a priori* hypotheses, especially when constructs are still little understood and conceptually overlapping (Vosgerau et al., 2019). To illustrate, in other recent research encompassing multiple HAS samples, multivariate analyses showed that social comparisons had robust, significant links with internalizing symptoms across all (i.e., in 100% of analyses conducted), while a conceptually related variable, envy of peers, was linked in less than half (33% of analyses conducted; Luthar, Suh, et al., 2020). For future research, these analyses led to the *a priori* hypothesis that distress among HAS students rests on feelings of inferiority in ongoing social comparisons rather than necessarily involving active resentment of others more successful.

Seeking such prioritizing of risk-modifiers via replications of effects, in the present study, central questions were examined among Asian Americans in three cohorts, representing pairs of schools within distinct geographic regions—the West, the South, and the Northeast. Combining schools within regions allowed for sufficient statistical power to enable three parallel within-group analyses of Asian American adolescents. Additionally, the decision to combine by region was based on evidence that ramifications of central constructs can differ by areas of the United States, given variations in levels of ethnic diversity. To illustrate, Yip and colleagues (2008) noted that levels of discrimination can differ greatly between metropolitan areas with large and long-standing immigrant communities (e.g., on the East and West coasts) compared with areas in the South (In this study, pairs of samples combined within region were comparable in terms of proportions of Asian American students at their respective schools, and in their geographical counties; see Method for details).

#### **Present Study**

In summary, aims of this study were to examine critical processes in psychological adjustment among Asian Americans in high-achieving schools. Examining three cohorts, the first goal was to determine how these students fared relative to their White counterparts on multiple psychosocial indicators. These included symptoms of depression, anxiety, isolation at school, as well as five vulnerability and protective factors likely to be of high salience for Asian American youth in particular: Feelings of discrimination, parent perfectionism, internalized achievement pressure, authenticity in self-presentation, and closeness to school adults. The second and more substantive goal was to uncover robust, unique associations for any of the five risk-modifiers among Asian American students, with substantial links replicated across all three cohorts.

#### **Method**

##### **Participants and Procedure**

Data in this study were collected in 2019 from six high achieving private schools, with two schools each from three regions of the United States: the West, South, and Northeast. All schools were K–12, and data presented here were on students in Grades 9–12. Descriptive data are shown in Table 1. The schools were all considered high achieving given average SAT scores ranging from 1300 to 1420 (86th to 96th percentile). Average tuition rates ranged from \$23,000 to \$46,000 (schools in the South and Northeast, respectively), with a mean of \$34,600 across the six schools.

The total number of participants in this report was 2,041. As shown in Table 1, percentages of Asian American students ranged from 10–18% across the schools, and 4–15% in the



**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Data on Participating Schools by Region*

Region and school	Asian Americans (AA)		Whites (W)		Tuition	% Part <sup>b</sup>	SAT Percentile	% Ethnicity by school <sup>c</sup>		% Ethnicity by county <sup>c</sup>		% Parents with ≥ college degree		% Parents with graduate degree		% Parents married	
	B <sup>a</sup> n	G <sup>a</sup> n	B n	G n				AA	W	AA	W	AA F/M <sup>d</sup>	W F/M	AA F/M	W F/M	AA	W
West																	
School A	48	54	148	119	\$38k	96	94–96	18	47	15	71	95/99	94/95	74/67	58/51	86	89
School B	43	57	138	119	\$38k	90	86–91	18	45	15	71	72/70	65/69	44/26	31/33	87	75
South																	
School C	24	37	164	162	\$23k	96	86–91	13	70	5	56	74/71	82/84	53/36	49/44	85	82
School D	17	20	122	126	\$26k	93	86–91	10	67	4	65	100/97	95/96	76/72	65/57	89	84
Northeast																	
School E	28	32	156	138	\$37k	95	86–91	12	58	8	80	83/82	93/96	41/33	59/60	85	81
School F	27	26	125	111	\$46k	98	94–96	14	61	6	73	86/89	89/91	61/50	61/52	81	81

Note. Ranges of SAT percentiles corresponding to average scores are provided rather than actual mean scores, to preserve confidentiality of the schools.  
<sup>a</sup> B = Boys; G = Girls; students identifying as gender nonbinary comprised less than 5% of the study population and thus were not included in the analyses. <sup>b</sup> Participation rates. <sup>c</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts (2020). <sup>d</sup> F = Father; M = Mother (or Parent A and B, for same sex parents).

counties in which they were located. About half the participants were female (45% to 51%). Most parents had college degrees, but rates varied across schools, from about 70% (School B) to over 95% (School D). Within individual schools, however, rates of college degrees among White versus Asian American parents were generally more similar. The vast majority of parents were married (81.9% Whites students and 85.6% of Asian Americans; note that as some families had same-sex parents, for assessments involving responses for parents separately by gender, students were asked to keep in mind “Mother or Parent A” and “Father or Parent B”).

Data for this study were taken from a larger packet of questionnaires administered by schools as part of their ongoing initiatives on positive youth development, based on salient issues and concerns that are identified specifically within their own student bodies (e.g., see Luthar, Ebbert, & Kumar, 2021; Luthar, Suh, et al., 2020). Following completion of data collection, each school shared their anonymous, de-identified data with the present research team, who shared summarized central findings with leadership within 7–10 days using interactive dashboards. Collaborative discussions then led to prioritizing of major intervention needs in that student body, along with strategies to begin to address these. Students completed these surveys in classrooms during school time, with the option to decline participation given to them as well as to their parents. Participation rates ranged from 93% to 98%. No identifying information of participants was collected (including IP addresses); data analyzed here were entirely anonymous.

## Measures

For all measures, high scores reflect high levels of the variable. Alpha coefficients for each measure are shown in Table 2, separately by student gender and ethnicity. Of the

six coefficients per measure, median values are reported in parentheses, as follows.

## Outcome Variables

The Well-Being Index (WBI; Luthar, Ebbert, & Kumar, 2020) is a 25-item measure assessing internalizing and externalizing symptoms and feelings of isolation at school. In this study, we examined the following three subscales, each consisting of five items rated on 5-point scale ranging from 0 = *never* to 4 = *very often*. These included *Depression*, for example, “I am sad or depressed” (median  $\alpha$  .84); *Anxiety*, for example, “I worry or obsess,” (median  $\alpha$  .85); and *Isolation at school*, for example, “At my school, I feel isolated or like I do not belong” (median  $\alpha$  .77).

## Predictor Variables

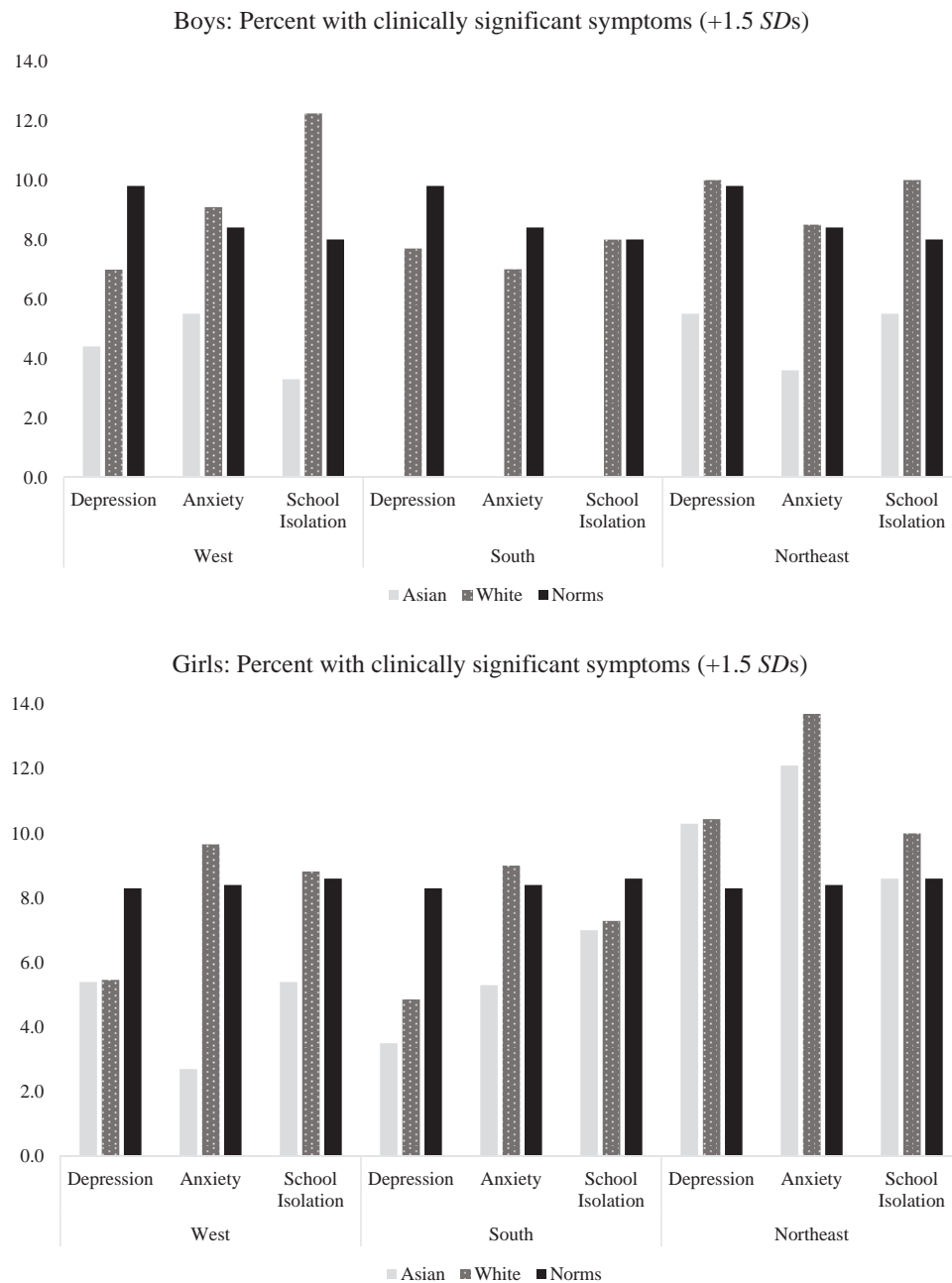
*Ethnic discrimination* was assessed by seven items adapted from the Subtle and Blatant Racism Scale for Asian American College Students (SABR-A; Yoo et al., 2010); rated on a scale from 1 = *almost never* to 5 = *almost always*, for example, “I am treated differently because of my race” (median  $\alpha$  .86; all seven items are listed in Supplemental Figure 1). *Parent perfectionism* was adapted from the Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (MPS; Frost et al., 1990), with three items on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*, for example, “I never feel like I can meet my parents’ standards” (median  $\alpha$  .89). *Internal academic pressure* was assessed by a single question, asking students to rate how much academic pressure they put on themselves ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *a great deal*.

*Authenticity* is a six item measure (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2015) rated on a 5-point scale from 1 = *not at all true* to 5 = *very true*, that assesses levels of comfort with being oneself,



**Figure 1**

*Percentages of Youth Reporting Clinically Significant Symptoms: Asian Americans, White, and Normative Samples*



Follow-up univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to identify significant mean group differences. In addition to statistical significance, effect sizes ( $\eta_p^2$ ) were considered for all comparisons; considering Cohen's (1988) criteria, values of .03 are considered small, .06 medium, and .12 large. Results are shown in Table 3. With regard to main effects for ethnicity, comparisons on outcome variables were

significant for Anxiety,  $F(1, 2029) = 12.87, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ , and School Isolation,  $F(1, 2029) = 36.56, p < .001, \eta^2 = .02$ ; Asian American students reported lower levels on both. With regard to predictor variables, differences were significant for Discrimination,  $F(1, 2029) = 259.42, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$ , Parent perfectionism,  $F(1, 1932) = 17.96, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ , Pressure-self,  $F(1, 1984) = 6.85, p < .01, \eta^2 = .003$ , and

**Table 3***Descriptive Statistics: Means and Standard Deviations of All Variables and ANOVAs Comparing Ethnic Groups*

Variable	Asian Americans						Whites						Ethnic group $F$ $\eta^2$
	West		South		Northeast		West		South		Northeast		
	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	
	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	Mean <i>SD</i>	
Depression	5.09	6.62	4.07	7.23	5.35	7.76	5.24	7.19	5.21	7.05	5.78	7.95	2.47
Anxiety	0.55	0.42	0.64	0.59	0.43	0.42	0.24	0.29	0.24	0.36	0.24	0.29	0.00
	5.78	8.13	4.90	7.84	6.06	9.76	6.56	9.14	6.14	9.51	6.40	10.45	12.87***
	0.44	0.48	0.66	0.67	0.57	0.66	0.25	0.33	0.25	0.30	0.25	0.32	0.01
School isolation	4.26	6.55	3.88	6.39	5.11	7.59	6.46	7.55	6.24	7.59	6.11	7.95	36.56***
Discrimination	0.40	0.38	0.60	0.53	0.51	0.52	0.23	0.26	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.25	0.02
	1.17	1.86	1.18	1.89	1.85	1.97	1.39	1.79	1.37	1.62	1.36	1.38	259.42***
	0.33	0.65	0.32	0.72	0.96	0.86	0.60	0.77	0.58	0.58	0.51	0.57	0.11
Parent perfectionism	2.30	2.87	2.34	2.66	2.38	2.47	2.42	2.66	2.44	2.81	2.40	2.37	17.96***
Pressure-self	1.04	1.08	1.06	1.15	1.11	1.06	1.03	1.10	1.01	1.16	1.04	1.11	0.01
	4.33	4.54	4.32	4.49	4.15	4.66	4.04	4.06	4.08	4.34	4.03	4.48	6.85**
	1.00	0.84	1.06	0.86	0.97	0.55	1.24	1.13	1.06	1.06	1.14	0.97	0.00
Authenticity	3.39	3.13	3.45	3.14	3.19	2.96	3.32	3.23	3.42	3.27	3.28	3.30	16.23***
Closeness to adults	0.91	0.84	0.84	0.82	0.92	0.97	0.89	0.87	0.89	0.78	0.92	0.85	0.01
	3.33	3.22	3.73	3.54	3.40	3.34	3.34	3.30	3.51	3.67	3.42	3.49	1.01
	0.96	0.95	0.96	0.95	0.84	1.08	0.96	0.97	1.02	0.89	0.98	0.99	0.00

Note. B = boys; G = girls. SD = standard deviation. Not included here are significant interactions between ethnicity and gender for isolation at school and ethnic discrimination.

\*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Authenticity,  $F(1, 1976) = 16.23, p < .001, \eta^2 = .01$ . In contrast to findings on outcomes, Asian Americans had poorer scores on these (higher on Discrimination, Parent Perfectionism, and Pressure-self, and lower on Authenticity).

With regard to main effects for gender, comparisons on outcome variables were significant for Depression,  $F(1, 2029) = 78.87, p < .001; \eta^2 = .04$ , Anxiety,  $F(1, 2029) = 141.28, p < .001; \eta^2 = .07$ , and School Isolation,  $F(1, 2029) = 73.97, p < .001; \eta^2 = .04$ . On predictor variables, a significant main effect was found for Pressure-self,  $F(1, 1984) = 33.45, p < .001; \eta^2 = .02$ . Girls reported higher levels than boys in all instances.

Main effect comparisons for region of the country were significant for only two predictors ( $F$  values not shown in Table 3), both with negligible effect sizes: Discrimination,  $F(2, 2029) = 4.72, p < .01; \eta^2 = .01$  and Closeness to adults at school,  $F(2, 2015) = 10.71, p < .001; \eta^2 = .01$ . With regard to interaction effects, similarly, only two were significant and again, effect sizes were negligible. The ethnicity by gender effect was significant in relation to School Isolation,  $F(1, 2029) = 4.95, p < .05; \eta^2 = .00$ ; and Discrimination,  $F(1, 2029) = 19.07, p < .001; \eta^2 = .01$ . As seen by means in Table 3, differences were larger between Asian American and White boys on School Isolation, and for girls on Discrimination, compared with parallel differences between their female and male counterparts, respectively.

In summary, Asian Americans fared slightly better than Whites on two of the three adjustment outcomes considered, Anxiety and School Isolation. By contrast, on four of

the five predictor variables considered, Asian Americans fared more poorly: Discrimination, Parent perfectionism, Pressure-self, and Authenticity. Effect sizes in these comparisons were small to negligible in all these group comparisons, with the exception of differences on Discrimination, where the  $\eta^2$  value approached the cutoff for large (.11).

### Post Hoc Analyses

Supplemental item-level analyses were done to further explore the findings on Discrimination, as this construct clearly stood out in all ethnic group comparisons as having a large effect size. Additionally, there was considerable heterogeneity in the scale's item contents ranging from being ignored (as in "I am overlooked because of my race") to experiencing overt hostility ("I am called derogatory names or racial slurs because of my race"). To explore whether specific dimensions might be particularly implicated in adolescents' distress, therefore, correlation coefficients between Discrimination items and outcomes were computed, with  $r$  coefficients  $\geq .30$  (values between .30 and .50 are considered meaningful, regardless of statistical significance; Cohen, 1988). As shown by shaded cells in Table 4, this cutoff of .30 was met for most items among Asian Americans. Most consistent were links for "I am treated differently because of my race" and "I am faced with barriers in society because of my race." As shown in Supplemental Figure 1, these were also the two items with the highest mean scores among Asian Americans, across gender and region.



**Table 4**  
Correlations Between Item Level Scores on Discrimination Measure and Outcomes (Depression, Anxiety, and Social Isolation), by Ethnicity, Gender, and Region

Discrimination measure items	Asian - West						Asian - South						Asian - Northeast						White - West						White - South						White - Northeast											
	Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx			Dep			Anx		
	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx	SI	Dep	Anx						
Boys																																										
Viewed with suspicion	0.26	0.17	0.16				0.47	0.40	0.18	0.15	0.18	0.21	0.24	0.13		0.34	0.15	0.18	0.22	0.25	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.27																		
Overlooked	0.19	0.15	0.07	0.23	0.36	0.03	0.23	0.36	0.03	0.49	0.30	0.36	0.31	0.17	0.41	0.19	0.22	0.25	0.11	0.12	0.13	0.23																				
Barriers in society	0.19	0.13	0.23		0.52	0.56	0.24	0.47	0.24	0.47	0.32	0.37	0.19	0.15	0.32	0.16	0.16	0.23	0.10	0.06	0.16																					
Treated differently	0.43	0.36	0.39	0.42	0.44	0.20	0.36	0.36	0.25	0.36	0.25	0.28	0.36	0.20	0.40	0.24	0.19	0.28	0.19	0.13	0.25																					
Difficult to date	0.47	0.24	0.50	0.50	0.39	0.47	0.27	0.43	0.26	0.43	0.26	0.41	0.24	0.09	0.33	0.13	0.15	0.15	0.05	0.03	0.08																					
Derogatory names	0.19	0.16	0.39	0.41	0.37	0.37	0.37	0.44	0.14	0.32	0.14	0.32	0.25	0.16	0.25	0.13	0.07	0.24	0.23	0.14	0.22																					
Made fun of	0.28	0.19	0.43	0.31	0.20	0.26	0.37	0.34	0.17	0.37	0.28	0.37	0.28	0.15	0.32	0.12	0.03	0.17	0.22	0.17	0.28																					
Total	0.41	0.28	0.43	0.55	0.56	0.31	0.47	0.47	0.28	0.40	0.36	0.40	0.36	0.21	0.46	0.22	0.19	0.30	0.21	0.16	0.30																					
Girls																																										
Viewed with suspicion	0.34	0.40	0.37	0.24	0.21		0.38	0.26	0.14	0.29	0.14	0.29	-0.03	0.08	0.16	0.07	0.09	0.09	0.02	0.03	0.07																					
Overlooked	0.44	0.44	0.49	0.26	0.39	0.39	0.39	0.36	0.21	0.35	0.21	0.35	0.14	0.11	0.22	0.12	0.07	0.11	0.07	0.09	0.19																					
Barriers in society	0.44	0.50	0.48	0.32	0.31	0.47	0.28	0.28	0.20	0.27	0.20	0.27	0.08	0.05	0.19	0.11	0.19	0.20	0.06	0.10	0.10																					
Treated differently	0.51	0.49	0.54	0.26	0.33	0.36	0.33	0.33	0.16	0.36	0.16	0.36	0.12	0.08	0.19	0.17	0.18	0.12	0.12	0.04	0.21																					
Difficult to date	0.28	0.36	0.37	0.31	0.38	0.45	0.12	0.01	0.01	0.08	0.01	0.08	0.01	0.03	0.10	0.07	0.17	0.13	0.03	-0.02	0.15																					
Derogatory names	0.31	0.26	0.35	0.28	0.41	0.22	0.34	0.22	0.22	0.40	0.22	0.40	0.07	0.09	0.14	0.13	0.15	0.22	0.12	0.14	0.19																					
Made fun of	0.39	0.35	0.45	0.28	0.34	0.53	0.35	0.35	0.28	0.48	0.28	0.48	0.16	0.12	0.29	0.15	0.14	0.17	0.14	0.13	0.26																					
Total	0.60	0.59	0.68	0.37	0.45	0.55	0.37	0.37	0.22	0.40	0.37	0.40	0.13	0.12	0.28	0.19	0.22	0.22	0.11	0.09	0.23																					

Note. Dep = depression; Anx = anxiety; SI = school-isolation. All  $r$ s  $\geq .30$  are significant at  $p < .05$ . Shaded cells in increasing gradation highlight values between .30-.39; .40-.49, and  $> .50$ , respectively.

### Multiple Regression Analyses

Multiple regression analyses were used to examine unique associations between predictor variables and the outcomes. As noted earlier, of central interest in these regressions were associations that might recurrently be linked with outcomes across Asian American students across all three regional cohorts. Accordingly, separate analyses were conducted for Asian Americans and Whites, following explicit recommendations in resilience research when the search is for robust *within-group effects* in a given group (parallel effects in any “low-risk” comparison groups are of secondary interest). Additionally, recommendations are to avoid using interaction terms (Predictors  $\times$  Group) as these tend to be unstable and can actually obscure important main effect links within the group that is of central interest (Luthar et al., 2000).

Preliminary analyses had shown that regression results were essentially the same for boys and girls in their respective subgroups (ethnicity and school), so they are presented for both genders together. Given high student participation rates (93% to 98%), missing data were negligible and were treated with listwise deletion. In interpreting results of regressions, associations were appraised for statistical significance as well as effect sizes. As recommended by Schäfer and Schwarz (2019); associations were considered noteworthy if  $\beta$  coefficients were equal to or greater than .20, the mean effect size in social-psychological research.

Results are presented in Table 5, predicting to scores on all three outcomes: Depression, Anxiety, and School Isolation. As shown in this table, the predictor variables collectively explained between 20% and 46% of variance. Total  $R^2$  value ranges were as follows (median values across subgroups are in parentheses): Depression, 24% to 46% (median 33%); Anxiety, 18% to 40% (median 24%); and School Isolation, 26% to 40% (median 33%).

With regard to unique associations for the different predictors, among Asian Americans, robust associations were between Discrimination and Depression, and also with School Isolation (see Table 5). For each of these outcome variables, all three of the  $\beta$  coefficients were statistically significant, and all three were  $\geq .20$ . With Anxiety as the outcome, two of the three were significant, and both were  $\geq .20$ .

*Authenticity* was the second variable to show consistent links among Asian Americans. With Depression as the outcome,  $\beta$  values were significant in all three regressions, and all were above .20 (see Table 5). In predicting to Anxiety, again,  $\beta$  values were significant in all three cases, and two were above .20. With School Isolation as the outcome, values were significant in two of three cases, with one above .20. Parenthetically, it should be noted that (unlike Discrimination), Authenticity also consistently showed links in all three White cohorts; coefficients were statistically significant in relation all three symptoms with the nine values each above .20.

**Table 5**

*Results of Multiple Regressions for Depression, Anxiety, and School Isolation as Outcomes:  $\beta$  Coefficients*

Outcome variable/ Predictor variables	Asian Americans			White		
	West ( $n = 202$ )	South ( $n = 98$ )	Northeast ( $n = 113$ )	West ( $n = 524$ )	South ( $n = 574$ )	Northeast ( $n = 530$ )
Depression						
Discrimination	<b><u>0.37***</u></b>	<b>0.35***</b>	<b>0.27***</b>	<u>0.07<sup>†</sup></u>	<u>0.08*</u>	0.08*
Parent perfectionism	<b>0.29***</b>	0.09	0.10	<b>0.22***</b>	0.17***	0.16***
Pressure-self	0.17**	0.18*	0.18*	0.11**	0.10*	<b>0.22***</b>
Authenticity	<b>-0.22***</b>	<b>-0.21*</b>	<b>-0.38*</b>	<b>-0.31*</b>	<b>-0.30***</b>	<b>-0.36***</b>
Closeness to adults	-0.11 <sup>†</sup>	-0.07	-0.06	-0.14***	-0.15***	-0.13***
Total $R^2$	0.46***	0.33***	0.40***	0.27***	0.24***	0.32***
Anxiety						
Discrimination	<b>0.32***</b>	<b>0.39***</b>	0.15	<u>-0.01</u>	0.07 <sup>†</sup>	0.04
Parent perfectionism	0.17**	0.06	0.03	0.16***	0.15***	0.12**
Pressure-self	<b>0.29***</b>	0.15 <sup>†</sup>	<b>0.29***</b>	0.19***	<b>0.20***</b>	<b>0.33***</b>
Authenticity	-0.13*	<b>-0.30***</b>	<b>-0.29**</b>	<b>-0.24***</b>	<b>-0.31***</b>	<b>-0.27***</b>
Closeness to adults	-0.05	-0.06	-0.02	-0.13**	0.00	-0.04
Total $R^2$	0.35***	0.40***	0.24***	0.18***	0.20***	0.24***
School isolation						
Discrimination	<b>0.42***</b>	<b>0.45***</b>	<b>0.27***</b>	<b>0.23***</b>	<u>0.12***</u>	<b>0.20***</b>
Parent perfectionism	0.16**	0.00	0.17*	0.18***	0.17***	0.09*
Pressure-self	0.19**	0.08	<b>0.22**</b>	0.16***	0.13***	0.18***
Authenticity	-0.14*	<b>-0.20*</b>	-0.12	<b>-0.25***</b>	<b>-0.32***</b>	<b>-0.32***</b>
Closeness to adults	-0.11 <sup>†</sup>	-0.12	<b>-0.29***</b>	-0.17***	-0.13**	-0.13***
Total $R^2$	0.40***	0.34***	0.39***	0.32***	0.26***	0.27***

Note.  $\beta$ s  $\geq .20$  are bolded, representing meaningful effect sizes (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019). Underlined values for discrimination indicate that pairs of  $\beta$ 's for Whites vs. Asians were significantly different in magnitude.

<sup>†</sup>  $p < .10$ . \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

For *Pressure-self* as a predictor variable,  $\beta$  values among Asian Americans were significant for Depression in three of three cases with one above .20. Beta values for Anxiety were significant in two of three analyses with both above the cutoff, and in relation to School Isolation two of three were significant but only one above .20. Links for the remaining constructs were much more sporadic. Among Asian Americans, none of them showed links that were statistically significant across the sets of three analyses predicting to any of the three outcomes, and in instances when they were significant, several coefficients were below the cutoff of .20.

### Supplemental Analyses

As anticipated, associations between Discrimination and outcomes were larger among Asian Americans as opposed to Whites; follow up analyses were conducted to determine if any of these differences were statistically significant. This was done by computing  $z$  scores for pairs of  $\beta$  coefficients (Cohen et al., 2013). As shown in Table 5, the difference in magnitude was statistically significant in two of three comparisons of pairs with Depression as the outcome, and in one of three each in predicting to Anxiety and School Isolation.

Supplemental regression analyses were also conducted to confirm that our combination of students into three cohorts had not inadvertently obscured meaningful differences among them, for example, with patterns of links differing in the pairs of schools that were combined. When analyses were conducted separately for each school separately, results were essentially the same as those shown in the tables;  $\beta$  coefficients were in the same direction and of similar magnitude, although loss of power led to loss of significance in some cases. In still further cross-checks on the stability of results involving the predictors of central interest, several demographic variables were included as controls (students' grade levels, mother's and father's education, and single parent family status); again, regression results were substantively the same.

To summarize major results of the regression analyses—considering both statistical significance and effect sizes—findings on Asian American students showed consistent, strong associations between Discrimination and both Depression and School Isolation as outcomes. In addition, Authenticity showed robust links with their scores on Depression, and in relation to Anxiety, it was significant in all three Asian American cohorts, with noteworthy effect sizes in two of the three. Unexpectedly, Authenticity showed robust associations with all three outcomes among White students as well, with robust effect sizes in all cases.

### Discussion

Findings of this study provide several insights that are directly tied to the central aims of this Special Issue. Overall

goals of this compendium were to illuminate adjustment processes among Asian American youth whose life experiences have been overlooked in developmental science. In their call for papers, the Editors noted that intersectional identities—such as those based on culture, language, sexual/gender identity/expression, and socioeconomic differences—“can result in experiences that are multiply marginalized, contributing to invisibility.” They underscored that no segment of the Asian American population that is struggling should be considered “irrelevant and unworthy of attention” (Yip et al., 2019).

There is perhaps no group considered less worthy of scientific attention than are Asian American youth attending HASs. The model minority stereotype highlights their academic successes, with the implicit assumption of all-around well-being. Yet, as noted at the outset of this article, students attending HASs in general are at elevated risk for psychological difficulties (NASEM, 2019). As most cohorts in prior studies of HASs have been predominantly White, small sample sizes have typically precluded within-school analyses by ethnicity; thus, little is known about how Asian Americans are doing relative to the racial majority in these high-performance settings, or about salient predictors of their well-being.

### Group Differences: A Mixed Picture

On the three adjustment outcomes examined here—feelings of depression, anxiety, and isolation at school—Asian American students were somewhat better off, overall, than their White counterparts. Differences between mean scores were significant for anxiety and isolation at school, although effect sizes were below the threshold for small effect sizes, with partial  $\eta^2$ s of .01 and .02, respectively. Similarly, when viewed against national normative data on over 15,000 students, with just one exception (girls in the Northeast), Asian Americans were well below norms on rates of clinically significant problems on all three outcomes.

The consistency of these findings could partly reflect ethnic differences in reporting psychological distress, but also, possibly that Asian American youth had protective processes unmeasured here. Among Asian Americans in general, some degree of underreporting—to the self as well as others—can potentially arise from stigmata associated with mental health problems, noted previously (Han & Pong, 2015; Lee et al., 2009). At the same time, it is possible that there were family-related processes that buffered the Asian American students against distress, such as high felt closeness to parents or greater family cohesiveness (e.g., Kiang et al., 2010; Warikoo et al., 2020).

It should be noted that the generally lower scores than Whites does not necessarily mean that Asian American students here were untroubled. In examining rates of clinically

significant levels on the three outcomes, it was just one subgroup—boys in the South—who had zero rates of scores above clinical cutoffs on all three outcomes. In all other instances, rates were about 3% to 6% among boys, and among girls, ranged from about 3% to 12%. The findings on boys in the South may represent an outlier, possibly a result of a small sample size (41 boys across both schools). At the same time, it could also be tied to protective processes from which these Asian American youth particularly benefited, such as closeness to parents, as mentioned earlier.

In contrast to trends on the three adjustment outcomes, on four of the five predictor variables examined here, Asian Americans fared more poorly than Whites. They reported higher levels of ethnic discrimination, higher perceived parent perfectionism, greater internalized achievement pressures, and lower levels of authenticity in everyday life. Effect sizes were small for three of these four cases, but for perceived discrimination, approached the cutoff for large, with a value of .11.

### **Vulnerability and Protective Processes: Perceived Discrimination**

Aside from being considerably higher among Asian Americans than Whites, perceived discrimination was clearly associated with high distress among them. Across Asian American subgroups by region, this construct was significantly linked with both depression and school isolation—in 100% of the six analyses—and in two of the three schools, to anxiety. The pattern of results resonates with prior findings that among Asian Americans, associations involving discrimination tend to be stronger for problems of depression than of anxiety (Gee et al., 2007). To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine implications for what is a critical adjustment dimension among adolescents: Feeling isolated or rejected in their school communities. Considering just the fact that they spend most of their waking hours at school, it is clearly problematic for any child to feel, strongly, that they do not belong, or do not want to be there.

Collectively, findings on discrimination underscore the need for educators to recognize the fact that this can affect children who are not typically thought of in this regard. As Kiang et al. (2016) noted, there can be advantages to the model minority stereotype among Asian American youth such as greater valuing of school and better academic performance. By contrast, feelings of discrimination consistently jeopardize functioning across domains including mental health, academic functioning, and physical well-being (Yip et al., 2020). It is unclear whether diversity initiatives at contemporary U.S. schools—even the most high-achieving and well-resourced—deliberately consider issues that are unique to Asian American students.

There also needs to be more attention to this issue in Asian American families. Wang and colleagues (2020) reported that ethnic/racial socialization is linked with better psychosocial adjustment among African American youth but among Asian Americans, with greater distress. The authors noted that given the overt, pervasive racism and the legacy of oppression experienced by African Americans, parents' ethnic/racial socialization could be buffers against denigrating, hostile societal messages. They also called for more attention to how Asian American parents can help their children develop skills to cope effectively with discrimination. In addition, Liu and colleagues (2019) note the important need to provide parents themselves with emotional support; undoubtedly, many of them contend with racism as do their children.

Given the samples in this study and post hoc findings at the item level, another issue worth noting is that feelings about being treated differently, or of facing societal barriers, may relate not just to aspects of cultural background but also to future educational opportunities. Relevant are some students' concerns that Asian Americans can be less likely than others to gain admission at selective schools even with exemplary resumes (see Wong, 2018). In the words of one junior from a focus group in research by the present team, "It feels very unjust that I would be personally be penalized because 'my people' work hard, and get good grades. How could we not become discouraged and demoralized about school?"

At this juncture, it is worth explicitly underscoring that adults must attend to children's felt discrimination across all groups affected; this is *not* a zero-sum game across ethnicities. There are issues that urgently call for changes at systemic levels such as gross societal inequities and both historical and recent acts of aggression toward African Americans and Hispanics. Native Americans have faced their own set of challenges historically, as have youth of Middle Eastern heritage, especially since 9/11. The point here is that even as adults continue much-needed advocacy around societal issues of racism, they must also address these issues directly with all affected children, in conversations with caring others at school and at home.

Among White students in this study, discrimination was not linked with depression in any of the three cohorts, in stark contrast to robust links among Asian Americans (respective  $\beta$ s of .07 vs. .37, .08 vs. .35, and .08 vs. .27; differences in the first two pairs of coefficients were statistically significant). At the same time, it was related to White students' feelings of isolation at school. It is possible that among these teens, feeling discriminated based on ethnicity may denote general feelings of being treated poorly at school (as opposed to being treated poorly as a minority, within mostly White communities). Future studies could shed light on this by examining overlaps with self-reported feelings of victimization by peers or by adults at school.



## Authenticity

In this study, the construct of authenticity was consistently linked with both depression and anxiety among Asian Americans, and in two of the three cohorts, with school isolation as well. As suggested at the outset, these findings may be related to the strains of being racially invisible in mostly White, upwardly mobile communities. Liu and colleagues (2019) note that to maintain the power and privileges associated with such settings, youth of color may work at becoming racially innocuous; this adoption of a false consciousness inherently leads to psychological tension. The authors underscore the importance of helping these students understand their own internalized stereotypes (i.e., false consciousness), and associated ramifications for mental health. They also call for more research on the “capacity for people of color to evaluate when and how to speak up as a source of strength and resilience despite the fact that there is little in the environment . . . to help reinforce this competency” (p. 151).

At the same time, it should be noted that authenticity (unexpectedly) showed robust links with all three outcomes among Whites as well. Considering all analyses across both ethnic groups, therefore, links for this construct were significant in 17 of the 18 analyses conducted (94%), with 15 of 18  $\beta$  coefficients (83%) between .20 and .38. These results suggest that authenticity could denote a more general marker of global or generalized distress. In prior research with adults, it has shown significant unique links across diverse outcomes examined: depression, anxiety, stress, loneliness, satisfaction with life, feelings of fulfillment and of emptiness, about everyday existence (Luthar & Ciciolla, 2015).

Why would low authenticity, have such strong links with these diverse facets of peoples’ distress? Probably because this construct represents an overarching feeling that one’s true self will not meet with love and acceptance from others; in fact, it will lead to disdain or rejection. This global feeling, in turn, could come from a variety of reasons, including aspects of identity relating to not just minority cultural heritage but also, possibly, sexual orientation or gender nonbinary status; low family SES amid mostly wealthy students; or feelings of personal inadequacy. In terms of implications for practice, the findings indicate the value of helping children with feelings of low authenticity—whatever their roots—to share their concerns about acceptance, beginning with at least one adult. Over time, this could pave the way for growing comfort in sharing their true self more widely in their everyday lives (Rogers, 1951).

## Limitations and Future Directions

A major limitation of this study is the inability to examine trends among Asian American students separately by their families’ countries of origin. Separate analyses by subgroups

of Asians were not possible here as school administrators, reportedly, had not wanted to ask students about families’ countries of origin (or immigration history); the preference was to limit questions simply to race/ethnicity. At the same time, this limitation is not uncommon in the field. There are several studies where small sample sizes have precluded disaggregation of analysis by Asian subgroups (e.g., Gee et al., 2007; Kiang et al., 2010, 2016).

Even with pairs of schools combined in three cohorts, the sample sizes of Asian American students in each were small relative to those of Whites. This should not have affected the findings substantively, however, as analyses of variance are robust to such differences in sample sizes (Mena et al., 2017). With regard to the regressions conducted here, statistical power was adequate. According to G\*Power (Faul et al., 2007) a minimum of 33 participants is needed to observe an effect size of at least .20 in multiple regressions with five predictors, at .80 power. The smallest sample size here was well above this.

Other limitations include the aspects of measurement and the cross-sectional design. With regard to the first issue, the sole reliance on self-reports could have led to some biases in symptom reports among Asian Americans, given under-reporting, especially among those more traditionally oriented (Shea & Yeh, 2008; Yip et al., 2008). Additionally, reliability of measurement was low in two instances, that is, for authenticity among boys in the South and West. The reasons for lower coefficients in two of the 12 values (see Table 2) are unclear, and it could be useful to further investigate the psychometric properties of the instrument in future research.

The cross-sectional design precludes any conclusions about causality, and more work will be needed to determine the degree to which findings are generalizable. Future prospective studies would be useful in examining links between predictors and outcome variables explored here, and also to determine changes in critical processes over time. Perceived discrimination levels, for example, can decrease with age or across the middle versus high school years, as might their ramifications for psychological adjustment (see Gee et al., 2019; Kiang et al., 2016). Future research might also consider alternative data analytic strategies. For example, assuming the availability of large enough samples of Asian American youth across different geographic regions, studies might use nested designs to ascertain associations involving constructs that were consistently found to be salient here (i.e., discrimination and authenticity). Generalizability of robust findings will also be useful to examine among Asian American youth from schools of lower overall achievement levels. Finally, future studies might also include additional potentially important constructs as compensatory factors, such as different aspects of support from

families and peers, and diverse dimensions of school climate.

Offsetting these limitations are several strengths of this work. First, there is concerted attention to within-group processes among a group of Asian American youth who are essentially absent in developmental science—Asian American youth in high-achieving schools. Second, findings show that rates of clinically serious distress levels are by no means high; yet, in some cases, can be manifest in 5% to over 10% of these youth—and this, despite the rich resources of their schools. Third, samples include students from multiple cohorts from different parts of the country, enabling conceptual replication on links regarding predictor variables. As scholars from different areas of psychology have noted, the nature of science is accumulative, and for any groups that are little studied, a priori hypotheses require prior in-depth, exploratory work, that is grounded in theory and ethnographic evidence (Cumming, 2012; Vosgerau et al., 2019). At a minimum, one hypothesis emanating from this study is that many Asian American youth in HASs do feel discriminated against (on some dimensions in particular), and those who experience discrimination can be at elevated risk for serious distress. A second is that feelings of inauthenticity among teens in general are a marker for overall psychopathology, especially in symptoms of an internalizing nature. Together, these findings could be critical in further developing theories on youth of Asian origins in the United States, and also for prevention and practice within schools, families, and communities.

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