

## Transcript: Anti-Asian Racism is Not New (Part Two)

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

Hello and welcome to The Table podcast, where we unpack questions regarding race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current events. My name is Rosemary Ferreira.

### **Courtney Jones Carney**

And I'm Courtney Jones Carney. Earlier this month we released the first episode of our two-part series, Anti-Asian Racism is Not New. In part one, we were joined by Drs. Crystal Han and Angeline Pham, psychiatry fellows at the University of Maryland. We discussed the history of anti-Asian racism and how to build solidarity movements across racial and ethnic groups. So, if you haven't listened to part one yet, what are you waiting for? Part two will still be here when you get back, we promise.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

In this episode we continue our conversation with Crystal and Angeline and discuss the impact of racial trauma on the mental health and well-being of Asians and Asian Americans and People of Color, more broadly. We started off by asking Crystal and Angeline about Crazy Stressed Asians, an affinity group for Asian students at UMB that they co-facilitate.

### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Well, I initially had kind of a semblance of an idea, and it was supported by kind of my project for the American Psychiatric Association Samsung Minority Fellowship, and it was kind of a half-baked idea that I roped Angeline into helping. The goal is to basically provide monthly discussion group spaces to be a safe space in the community for Asian and Asian-Americans to explore the impact of our race, culture and heritage and identity on mental well-being. And for myself it's been a really amazing and fulfilling experience. I feel so humbled every meeting that we hold, I'm in awe of just how open and vulnerable people are talking about these really difficult personal topics and sharing their experiences which are really difficult sometimes with people who have never met in person and so I'm always just really humbled doing it and I think it exposes how much of the need there's been a dedicated space for Asian and Asian-American to have.

### **Dr. Angeline Pham**

Yeah Crystal actually approached me back in the summer of last year after we had been at a social justice meeting together and she shared with me and pitched her idea of creating this discussion group for Asian students to have a safe space to explore things like culture and identity as well as mental health in Asian community and I thought it was such a great idea cause I grew up with not that many Asians in school or college and this was something like I wish I had as a student as well.

### **Dr. Crystal Han**

And I want to say that I grew up with a lot of Asians in high school and college and med school and even then you know we weren't we're kind of socialized to not talk about it and so we even with very similar

lived experiences it's not something that I ever felt really comfortable talking even with among Asian peers.

**Courtney Jones Carney**

Can you maybe share a little bit about some of the common themes that come up in your group discussions?

**Dr. Angeline Pham**

So, one of the things that's been a common theme that I've noticed has been woven into each of our sessions is that Asian Americans are commonly grouped into this like monolith group and what I picked up on is that our conversations have really shed light on how much diversity there is among this monolithic race. It's been really wonderful to be able to hear so many different perspectives from people of different ethnicities some of which are immigrants, some of which are first gen, second gen and they all come from very different educational backgrounds as well and sometimes even from very different upbringings. I think what's been really beautiful is that we can all come together and have meaningful conversations where we explore things like cultural identity, concepts such as shame and guilt and we can also even process the difficult events of this past year such as being Asian in the time of COVID.

**Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah I completely agree that that was like a really striking thing I've noticed as well in the groups and along the same lines we talked a lot about the model minority myth and how it kind of serves the purpose to keep Asians grouped as like a homogeneous monolithic and impassive group of people who are hardworking and obedient and like politically silent and where we're seeing as like this group that's all academically high-achieving or economically successful but as we seen in our groups like that's very much not the case and the myths seem to kind of invalidate all of the ranges on varieties of differences all of us have experience within the group and it serves to kind of continue the oppression of our Asian community as a minority in a lot of different ways.

**Courtney Jones Carney**

Have you ever talked about this shift that happened in the US like going from the Chinese Exclusion Act and Japanese internment camps to then model minority why can't everyone else be like Asian American folk? Have you kind of unpacked that at all?

**Dr. Crystal Han**

I think that we definitely talked around those themes, my understanding is that the model minority myth kind of was birthed around the 60s or alongside the civil rights movement and really served to pit Asians against Black communities and we've certainly unpacked all of the complicated layer nuances of Black-Asian relationships and so I think that the model minority myth absolutely yeah like functions in that way and is very insidious 'cause it's kind of poses like a good thing for Asians but is not is not a good thing for Asians in many ways because it invalidates the very real struggles that Asians do go through and it serves to be a false dichotomy of like well why can't Black people just do all of these things and you know which is very damaging for both of our community.

**Rosemary Ferreira**

Yeah I appreciate you bringing that up, these false dichotomies that exist that are developed by these racist systems that we live in. That is one of the questions that we wanted to ask you, you know with the rise in anti-Asian hate crimes that have been happening there has been a 150% increase according to a recent report in 16 cities across the US of anti-Asian hate crimes, and of course political leaders such as Trump kind of fueling the fire in this racist rhetoric by calling Covid-19 the quote "China Virus" and so we wanted to hear your thoughts on you know the impact of anti-Asian racism on the mental health and well-being of Asians and Asian-Americans as psychiatrists.

#### **Dr. Angeline Pham**

It's definitely a lot of processing and that's not a common thing that we've been processing during our monthly groups as well they're certainly been this perpetuation of this racist link between Asian-Americans and the coronavirus and that's really unfortunately been filled by statements and comments made by people in high positions of power like Trump. And this unfortunately has had a really lasting impact even several months later. It's a startling statistic as well to see the significant rise in hate crimes against Asians and additionally these attacks are commonly happening in places like Chinatown which has already been hit especially hard economically by Covid and are typically more vulnerable communities with more elderly Asian individuals or individuals who may have a lower socioeconomic status. And a common thing I've heard is that Asians are scared as a result and they're becoming more isolative which can in turn also have a tremendous impact on one's mental health as well and studies have shown that Asian Americans who faced Covid-19 discrimination have higher levels of anxiety and depression so it would actually be interesting to see what studies we will find regarding the long-term effects of this racial trauma. The other complicated matter is that Asians are two to three times less likely to seek mental health treatment and that's often due to commonly ingrained values and things surrounding shame and stigma as well as fears of being judged as well.

#### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah, I really agree with all of those points I heard that a lot of schools across the country are opening up but a disproportionately high amount of Asian parents are keeping their kids at home and choosing not to send them back in great part because of the racial violence that they are afraid that their kids are going to experience. And within our groups we talk all the time really about the burden of the racism rise due to Covid and having an effect on all of us and you know before Covid we were already putting up with questions like "where are you from? No, where are you *really* from?" and like overt racial slurs like chinks or like jokes about like slanty eyes and like the food we eat, like that was always happening. And now Covid, we talked about how it's just kind of exposed the extent of which the racism that was always there and how it is you know our acceptance in American society was always kind of conditional and very fragile and unstable and I think that Angeline and I share in the experience of a lot of our group participants of really feeling that feeling of being othered and the burden, like, the heaviness of the burden that's constantly there of being like: are people looking at me weird or different or like how am I being seen when I go outside the discomfort of going outside now, wondering if this person is going to be friendly or say something verbally violent or do something physically violent? And I think all of that plays into Angeline's point of how very understandably it comes with an increase of like depressive and anxiety symptoms.

#### **Rosemary Ferreira**

I think shame and guilt was brought up a couple of times already in our conversation and I know that you know the topic of mental health in a lot of other communities of color immigrant communities as

well as something a bit of a taboo so I wanted to hear from y'all like how can we unpack that shame and guilt that exists within immigrant communities, within communities of color?

**Dr. Angeline Pham**

I think it stems from talking about it more openly and not treating it as something that needs to be a taboo topic and it could even just be as simple as starting to have conversations just around emotions which is something that's not very commonly done in Asian communities. We don't really ever talk about you know how we're feeling emotionally, when we're struggling we don't really share that with our parents 'cause we don't feel comfortable with it 'cause it's just never been a thing. We talked about in the past during our groups how it might come from you know the immigrant community having to come to the US from you war-torn countries and surviving a lot of trauma in their mother country and it might have been a way of survival because that's just the last thing that you have time to think about when you're trying to focus on just surviving. It doesn't create much of a space to be able to speak openly about your emotions and sharing about the hardships and even just thinking about those things because you're just too busy worrying about putting food on the table and just making ends meet. I think also another thing that complicates the situation is the concept of saving face is very big in the Asian community and that's where you kind of only portray the best of you to others and you keep those things hidden but unfortunately that leads to a lot of people suffering in silence and not getting the help they need and sometimes it can end very tragically too if people aren't getting the help they need. So, I think just starting by normalizing mental health and talking about it and I think that this group serves as a way for people to talk about it and I think just also in general, the general shift of things on a lot of Asian people are speaking out openly, like celebrities are speaking about it and people are forming blogs and groups like that to just openly share about their own personal experiences.

**Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah, I really agree with all of those are all really poignant points kind of detailing a lot of People of Color experiences in part because you know especially in America, being a Person of Color in any racial community pretty much guarantees some form of oppression that you're experiencing. So I think that there's so much commonality in all of our experiences regardless of which specific ethnic group you belong to and it's very ubiquitous and kind of share this is culture of silence and the trauma like a traumas may be different but I think that a lot of it just stems from generations of trauma in Asian countries and other countries and trauma being transmitted like throughout generations and the culture of well I don't want to say culture because that almost makes it sound like that's some kind of like inherent part of our communities which is not but just like the perpetuation of silence of our suffering and like just get through things not talking about it cause if you talk about it, maybe it makes it real and a lot of people don't have to practice or resources to handle the reality of the stuff that we go through and it just speaks to how much of a need there is in the mental health community and just society at large in first of all acknowledging and validating that this type of trauma and suffering is going on, and then going on to address it by having these conversations and providing resources so that you can have these conversations and be able to manage and like process and handle it cause it's all a very difficult journey to do all of that.

**Courtney Jones Carney**

Really appreciate your point about the silence across communities of color I probably cannot count how many times someone has asked me how I was doing and I've given them this very surface answer, could be my parents, it could be my husband, right, I'm not talking about like random people that I don't know but folks that I have relationships with who I have just said I'm fine right everything's okay and I haven't

revealed all of the things that are going on in my head. And I do think that in this new environment that we're in right now with Covid-19, I've been a little bit more honest I've told people I'm overwhelmed, I'm struggling, it's been a really long week, and I've been able to get more in touch with that and that might be because it's clear that other people are struggling too. But it seems like when everyone else seems okay then I feel this need perhaps to also put on that face that I'm okay and not make the conversation awkward.

#### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah, totally. And I think that it sucks that it took a pandemic for everyone to be like you know what I'm not doing okay like it should have been okay to not be okay even before this happened and I think that is very common, that kind of imposter syndrome just like everyone else seems to be holding it together so why can't I when I think that it's so you know widespread that everyone you know struggles with different things and as a society it's so hard for us to normalize that. And say that it is okay to be struggling with these things and not feel like you shouldn't be or like you should be doing different or should be feeling different and that by itself is like an additional separate burden on top of the thing that you're already struggling with like the feeling that you can't talk about it or that you're not allowed to do it or if you should feel bad or something like that so I think that's hopefully something, I agree, I think the younger generation is moving away from that and normalizing talk about mental health and mental wellness and I hope that that continues for sure.

#### **Rosemary Ferreira**

It's also important to highlight that often times we feel that our mental health is an individual problem, but we also need to make sure that we examine the ways that society reinforces feelings of shame and guilt. Meritocracy is one of the ways that society makes us feel bad about ourselves. If we don't pull ourselves by our bootstraps and get a good job or buy the house with the white picket fence then we're a failure. But for people of color and other marginalized identities, there are so many institutional barriers to our success. I asked Crystal and Angeline their thoughts on this.

#### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Living in like a capitalist society is always just like about production and efficiency and like people talk about work-life balance and wellness and it's easy to get lip service to that but like our actions and like the demands that are put upon us are not aligning with that at all. And I think that it is really hard because all of these subliminal messages from both just our American culture itself in terms of just like work and you should be like passionate and you should be like doing all this work all the time and in conjunction with that like the structural racist components of meritocracy of pulling yourself up by your bootstraps and perpetuating this fallacy of like you can overcome anything if you put in enough effort like really functions to continue like oppression by invalidating the structural factors that make it like literally impossible to overcome obstacles seamlessly. And I think all of that does serve to like both of those things combined especially for people of color like serves to really you know beat down our mental health in our mental wellness and I think Angeline mentioned earlier the first step is really starting conversations with people and even with yourself like I have to put in a lot of effort and it's an ongoing process to monitor and become aware of my own self talk and how I talk to myself and the way I hold expectations of myself and it's like really something that I need to monitor consciously all the time of being kind to myself and validating myself in the struggle I'm having and telling myself that it is okay to be feeling like this right now and you know kind of challenging all of these narratives that are being fed to us constantly.

**Courtney Jones Carney**

Thinking about like that positive self-talk and what's your messages you're communicating your stuff to yourself, on the opposite you talked about, you mention imposter syndrome and so that has come up so many times in so many spaces in such a short period of time, specifically where folks across social identities have been talking about this feeling of being revealed as a fraud that they're not as smart or as accomplished as good as they think they are or as other people think that they are and like one day it's all going to fall apart, so I'm going to figure it out that they're none of those things. So, are those things at all coming up in the work that you're doing in the group or do you have any suggestions on what people can do when imposter syndrome seems to be rising up how did they tape that back down how do they work through that?

**Dr. Angeline Pham**

Yeah that's a great question and to be honest I have been a victim of imposter syndrome many times in the medical field as well especially when we made the transition from being a medical student to being a resident and being the doctor that puts in the orders and makes the clinical decisions for patients. And I remembered always doubting myself even just when I was ordering, I remember ordering my first Tylenol order and doubting myself and wondering if I order the right dose or if I was like oh my gosh I'm going to hurt the patient if I don't do this right. And I think that it's something that it is very common and I'm glad to hear that it's not just me and it's like common across all different groups as well I think the important thing is acknowledging it and recognizing what it is and also realizing that it's an automatic thought and it's a feeling that we have to check it and realize that we have gotten to where we are because of you know what the work we put in and because of all the countless hours of studying and knowing that we got this and if we don't it's okay to ask for help because no one knows or has the answers to everything.

**Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah I really agree with that and I think along those lines was really helpful is kind of just like having conversations that are genuine and vulnerable with other people and if you can facilitate that in those relationships you very quickly see that like you said tons of people struggle with this. Actually, in one of our group's last night we were talking about kind of like Asian stereotypes and someone was like I'm actually really bad at math, and the entire group was like wait I'm also really bad at math and we are all Asian. And so like I think that as Angeline said like catching these spots and bring awareness to it and yourself is always a first step cause it's very easy to have these thoughts and then just immediately take it as truth and be at like oh I am bad at this or I do suck cause I made this mistake and the first it's always trying to catch them as they happen and be like what wait a second like where does that come from is like what evidence is there to support that is true versus not and trying to I guess do almost therapy on yourself and trying to reframe things in the way that's like very truthful cause you don't want to be telling yourself I'm great at all these things that you might not actually be great at but rather be like I am good at these things and I do know stuff about these things and I put in a lot of work for this and I'm doing a good job at this. And at the same time these are things that I do feel less comfortable with and I like to improve more and kind of like being real with yourself and that way, but you can always be real with yourself with kindness and with gentleness, even hard truths can be said to yourself with kindness. You don't have to you know it doesn't have to come with like guilt and shame and doubt and I think that it's of course easier said than done but I think it's like a muscle that the more you work out the stronger it becomes and the easier it gets and having these conversations with other people too and normalizing all of it can also be really helpful.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

Yeah I think that internal dialogue is so important in terms of our developing our sense of self and developing healthier holistic sense of self and I wanted to hear your thoughts on then connecting that internal dialogue to then dialogues with people of different races of different ethnicities, what can that kind of dialogue look in that dialogue based, and kindness based in love and grace, what can that look like when engaging with other folks?

### **Dr. Angeline Pham**

Yeah, that's a great question Rosemary and I think it first starts with having an open mind and practicing acceptance and tolerance of others and it means taking the time to try to understand the history of different communities of color and taking the time to listen to their struggles as well. It also means not only advocating for your own Community but also you know fighting for social justice among all minority groups because that's how real change happens, and I think that taking the time to understand each other and understand what in the history has led us to get to this point is what will give us the ammunition to be able to come up with ways to change things and I think that can only serve to unite us.

### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah I really agree with all those things, I think that in my work with Angeline with these groups and in just educating myself in general recently about social injustice and kind of like anti-black racism it's become more and more apparent with every single thing I learned how much I don't know, how little I was taught and all of us are taught in our schools about all of these socio-historical like context and events in every minority group really. And that has been really valuable to me just in my personal growth of learning this information and it being like Oh my God it makes so much sense now and now that I see it I can't see it anymore and kind of just like that was a huge is an ongoing journey and I think I really agree with Angeline's kind of coming to these conversations with open-mindedness and kind of like validation even if it's with people who are not on the same page as me. Which has been really really hard like I think that productive conversation always has to be founded on just like mutual respect first of each other as a person and validating each other's feelings and experiences even if the content of what you're saying may not be something I completely agree with and these difficult conversations I have had with even people within my own race, so it's, I think the most important thing is to keep the dialogue going.

### **Courtney Jones Carney**

Well since you mention anti-blackness some Asian activist have been raising awareness of anti-Asian hate crimes and they've been called out for being anti-Black because they've advocated for an increase in police presence and also there have been instances where there been arguments that people aren't turning out for Asian and Asian-American in the same way that they're turning out for black lives matter for the Black Lives Matter movement. So, do you have any suggestions on how Asian and Asian-American communities can fight for themselves and their humanity without embodying anti-blackness?

### **Dr. Angeline Pham**

Yeah this one is actually a topic that was brought up during our discussion group this past week and it certainly isn't an easy question or topic to address. I think part of it, it goes back to the Asian model minority myth I think that plays a huge role in Asians being oppressed and others perceive that Asians are successful that we don't cause trouble that we are meek, we're obedient and we as Asians feed into

it as well and end up gaslighting ourselves and this in turn plays into our own oppression. And we may feel that we have it better than the black community in terms of not having to constantly worry about being pulled over for senseless things or fear our lives every time we step out the door and leave our house. So in that sense we can sometimes feel like we don't have the right or the space to complain or speak up about our struggles because we feel like we have things better than the black community in that sense but it also becomes a very complex issue when we see that some of the attacks on Asians are being perpetrated by other minority groups and it would be dangerous to try to just automatically jump to conclusions or make assumptions without trying to take a deeper look at the potential root causes. We got to exam what's going on a systemic level and that will help us better understand how all minority groups are being oppressed in different ways and maybe how that plays a role in the concept of oppression, the concept of Oppression Olympics which is where different minority groups are seemingly like pitted against each other which in turn basically distracts from the root systemic problems that lead to oppression in all of these different minority groups.

### **Dr. Crystal Han**

Yeah, I really agree with all of that, and I think as Angeline mentioned Black communities and Asian communities are both oppress in different ways, Asian people do not have the same history specific interactions of being oppressed the way Black people have and so I think that is a part of why some Asian people may be advocating for increased police presence in light of these anti-Asian hate crimes. But I think that if we're addressing violence against Asian communities but consequently furthering stereotypes about black criminality or at the risk of increasing police violence against black communities that we were missing the problem as Angeline pointed out, the problem being racist systems marginalizing both of our communities and pitting them against each other. Michelle Kim is a Korean American writer and activist whose word I really enjoy and she had mentioned that in Oakland, California where a large proportion of these anti-Asian hate crimes happen the Chinatown there is two blocks from the Oakland Police Department and clearly that did not deter these anti-Asian hate crime from happening and in the past couple months there has been like multiple instances where Asian people had mental health crises and were shot and wounded and killed by police. And I was looking up some data about how even when police are called for Asian-American just like incidents they are often not documented correctly or responded with much urgency especially in lower-income marginalize Asian communities that don't have a lot of like political voice or power and that you know is not a long-term or viable solution I don't think to the general broad systemic problems of white supremacy that really is the root of all of it and I think that it is not productive even though it might be easy to kind of like focus on these superficial solutions to these things, it is not productive I don't things to focus on who's turned out for BLM who's turning out for this and that I think that all of us should be using our voices to amplify and denounce racism against all communities and that should just be where our energies are focusing and like the media should be doing that. It should be like bringing more attention on anti-Asian hate crime but spending our energy criticizing did or didn't show up when is distracting from the problem and you know coming together and in solidarity is kind of like the way for change.

### **Rosemary Ferreira**

We want to thank Crystal and Angeline for coming to our table and sharing powerful insights on the mental health and wellbeing of Asians and Asian Americans, specifically as they navigate the impacts of racial trauma. We want to leave you will some final words from Crystal that we hope grounds the collective work to stop Asian hate and white supremacy.

### **Dr. Crystal Han**

In our groups there's been themes that are not new but resurfaced of now maybe people can see the suffering that AAPI communities have been experiencing this whole time. Like maybe now people will believe that we are a minority 'cause with the model minority stereotype, I think is very kind of like it serves to silence and make invisible the racist struggles that Asian people have been carrying on you know, since forever and so it was tragic and a lot of people felt impacted and even more unsafe than they already felt, and even more othered and not belonging in society, which is really, really horrible and I hope that kind of like the momentum from this tragedy is that people maybe will become... will listen. You know, start actually paying attention to the fact that that our communities have been victims of like racism and being a, you know, minority for a long time. And I think that if you can call it a silver lining, that's kind of what the only silver lining you can gain from it is like hopefully the awareness will spread that education will spread and the works for solidarity to kind of like address the racist underpinnings of a society will make progress.

[MUSIC TRANSITION]

**End Credits (Producer, Angela Jackson):** The Table is a production of the Intercultural Center in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland Baltimore. It's hosted and produced by Courtney Jones Carney and Rosemary Ferreira. This episode was also written by Rosemary. The show's executive producer and editor is me, Angela Jackson, senior marketing specialist in the Division of Student Affairs. For more information about the Intercultural Center, including events where students can learn more about race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current, visit [umaryland.edu/ile](http://umaryland.edu/ile). Thanks for listening, see you next time.