



The Cultural Impact of COVID-19

In this issue, we explore the cultural impacts of COVID-19. This pandemic has uniquely affected a number of minority communities, but we focus this week on the experiences of international students, DACA and undocumented students, and students whose names, skin-color, and cultural backgrounds make them targets for hatred and discrimination amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr. Sherry Wang, assistant professor of Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University, states: "The initial spread of [COVID-19] is linked to a geographical location and not to a race or national origin." Still, groups and individuals of Chinese or Asian descent are feeling the impact of xenophobia and prejudice as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic; this has led to resurgence of explicit racist acts which, in some cases, are physically violent toward Asians in American and European countries. This is not the first time that an infectious disease has served as justification for some to target and stigmatize specific racial and ethnic groups (e.g., AIDS, Spanish Flu, MERS, and SARS) but it is important to address this bias for many reasons.

Xenophobia based on COVID-19 is fundamentally misinformed. [A recent article](#) from the American Psychological Association states, "While the origin of the virus appears linked to a specific region of China, no one racial or ethnic group is at greater risk of infection or spread."

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To reiterate, your friends of Chinese descent are *no more likely* to carry the virus than your friends from other backgrounds – risk is related to likelihood of exposure and not to someone's racial identity.

Stigma can keep people from admitting they are symptomatic and getting the treatment they need. If a person is being shamed and accused of spreading COVID-19 based on their cultural background, it makes sense that they might feel so defensive that they deny any symptoms they go on to develop. This is clearly dangerous for their health and for the health of others who have contact with them. No person should feel so afraid or ashamed about the implications of their symptoms that they do not seek treatment.

Minorities often lack access to health care. Whether it's about limited access to health insurance or more broadly about financial strain, minorities who do choose to seek treatment may struggle to afford it. Even if they can afford it, minorities frequently encounter other barriers to treatment, such as lack of culturally-informed care. This is one way in which pre-existing systemic bias makes it difficult for people to receive care and to contain/treat COVID-19 and is likely reflected in [recently released statistics](#) about the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on African American communities in Chicago.

Racism and prejudice can cause serious mental health concerns. In addition to the above implications for physical health, engaging in xenophobic remarks and activity can contribute to long-term concerns like trauma, depression, anxiety, and even the way the brain functions. These are obviously challenges in their own right but also impact an individual or group's ability to engage with systems in a way that breaks the cycles of inequity and inopportunity that many minority groups face.

Want to do something to reduce stigma and discrimination? See Page 3!

Coping with Race-Related Stress

Validate your experiences with racism. Some may be microaggressions and others may be overtly racist. Your reactions may include many different and evolving emotions, and they are all valid. Take some time to be with those feelings and to know that you deserve to be treated fairly and with respect.

Connect to our cultural identity. Consider immersing yourself in experiences related to your cultural backgrounds. You can do this by taking classes, joining organizations, or simply talking to relatives or friends with shared identities. See the resource guide on page 3 for ideas on where to start forming connections. This will help you...

Build a support network. You are not alone in coping with race-related stress, and connecting with other people with similar experiences and feelings can help you successfully navigate racism. It can also help you share the burden of making change and give you validation when the world won't seem to listen. Consider attending [this upcoming event](#) to engage on this topic with supportive others!

Seek stability, fairness, and control. Many minority groups lack the privilege of these factors in their interactions with the world. Seek to soothe these unmet needs with self-care and support when they are denied on individual, group, and systemic levels.

Use your belief system to cope. Connect with your belief system, whether religious, spiritual, or philosophical. Calibrating your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors to your values can bring comfort and peace of mind about your approach to this unique stressor.

Consider social action. Some individuals and groups find it helpful to cope with their distress by engaging in social justice-related activism. You can do in many direct or indirect ways. One way is to donate to community organizations that provide economic support to minority communities. Another way might be to document acts of racism or intolerance and share them with trusted others who can help you make a change. Enlist others to confront these issues with you, and be concrete about what you are looking to see change. Certain factors that may make others more receptive to your message (timing, tone, etc.) Asian and Asian-American individuals are encouraged to [report racist incidents here](#). If you experience bias and/or discrimination at UIC, please fill out a [Student Assistance Report](#); after you complete the form, a Dean of Students staff member will follow up with you. Your feedback is powerful, and while change does not always happen overnight, it may never happen without brave voices like yours.

For additional resources for Asian individuals impacted by COVID-related racism, [click here](#).

For International Students

We recognize that you are faced with additional stress and uncertainty as you navigate immigration related constraints related to studying in the US. You may have lots of questions about how your visa status is impacted by virtual learning, what happens if you have to go back home, and how to address financial hardship. You may also have family members in your home country who are impacted by COVID-19 and be contending with not being able to be home. We see you and recognize your unique struggles.

We encourage you to find meaningful ways to connect with those important to you – here at UIC and Chicago or back home. This is the time to get creative with video platforms, watching movies together online, and gathering friends onto a group video call. It's normal to have a range of emotions at this time, including sadness, increase in worry, difficulty focusing and changes in sleep and appetite. We strongly encourage all students to give themselves permission to acknowledge these reactions while gently working to create a suitable routine for themselves.

Resources: Please remain in touch with your [OIS](#) adviser for up to date guidance related to visas, traveling home, or significant changes to your course schedule. OIS is working remotely, but advisers are ready to support you by phone or video during regular business hours. Review the [Coronavirus/COVID-19 Updates for the UIC International Community](#), which answers many frequently asked questions and is being updated as the situation unfolds. [Student Legal Services](#) can also provide guidance on student visas.

DACA and Undocumented Students

Our thoughts are with you as you navigate additional layers of uncertainty in light of the current pandemic. It is normal to experience a range of reactions at this time, and the most important piece of guidance we want to offer you is to accept whatever feelings or reactions you may be having in any given moment.

For our DACA students, we recognize that the pandemic hits at a key time where many of you may have been in process of renewing your DACA. We recognize there may be extra pressure (and financial implications) to get your application in on time, and these additional resources offer some guidance.

Resources:
[UIC and external resources for undocumented students navigating COVID-19](#)
[Guide for seeking medical treatment while undocumented](#)
[Citizenship and COVID-19 Aid in Chicago](#)
[Comprehensive resource guide for immigrants during COVID-19](#)
[Local resources for undocumented, LGBTQIA+ and first generation Latinx students](#)
[Q+A about renewing DACA](#)
[Mental health in the post-DACA era](#)

WHAT CAN I DO?

Want to help reduce the negative cultural impact of COVID-19? Try these:

1. Share facts, not biased information about transmission of COVID-19. Do not share images or stories that negatively depict certain groups.
2. Do not shun, disparage, or attack others simply because you think they look like others who you think are at risk.
3. Ask your friends and family how they may be impacted by bias and discrimination related to their cultural identities during COVID-19. Listen to and validate their experiences.
4. Respect the privacy of anyone who shares their own health concerns with you.
5. Speak out when you see racism or xenophobia! You can also report discrimination/harassment incidents that occur within the UIC system [here](#).
6. If you are a member of a group who is experiencing marginalization and stigma related to COVID-19, consider seeking support from trusted others who can provide safety and guidance, including mental health providers. See the resource guide below for more ideas!

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS/EVENTS

FEELIN' GOOD FRIDAYS WORKSHOP SERIES

FRIDAYS FROM 11:00AM-NOON, STARTING APRIL 3RD
Join us online for weekly workshops on: healthy mind/healthy body, test anxiety, and self-compassion and gratitude. Registration is required through emailing Johanna Strokoff (jstrokof@uic.edu) and Yun Lu (YunLu@uic.edu). Students are welcome to register for one to all workshops. [Click here](#) for more information!

MANAGING YOUR MOOD DURING A PANDEMIC WORKSHOP SERIES

TUESDAYS FROM 4-5:30PM, STARTING APRIL 14TH
Join us online for a 3-week structured dialectical behavioral therapy skills workshop! [Click here](#) for more information and to register.

COMBATTING DISCRIMINATION AND XENOPHOBIA IN THE FACE OF COVID-19

THURSDAY, APRIL 16TH FROM 12-1PM
In the midst of COVID-19 we would like to create a space for UIC students, faculty and staff who are experiencing heightened social stigma, discrimination, or prejudice. We would also like to invite those who may not be subject to such discrimination but would like to provide support and advocacy. For more information and to register, [click here!](#)

UNITED PEER SUPPORT NETWORK GROUPS

MEETING WEEKLY AT THREE DIFFERENT TIMES!
Looking to feel more connected during this time of isolation? Our peer-led support groups are now meeting online and are open to any student! [Click here](#) for more information and to register.

NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE...SELF-CARE!

[COVID-19 Fact-Sheet in Different Languages](#)

Support for Underrepresented Racial and Ethnic Groups at UIC

[African American Academic Network](#)

[African American Cultural Center](#)

[Arab American Cultural Center](#)

[Asian American Resource and Cultural Center](#)

[CHANCE Program](#)

[First at LAS](#)

[Hispanic Center for Excellence](#)

[Language and Cultural Learning Center](#)

[LARES](#)

[Latino Cultural Center](#)

[Native American Support Program](#)

[Office for International Students](#)

[TRIO Program](#)

[UIC Global](#)

Additional UIC Resources for Cultural and Social Groups

[Chi Alpha Campus Ministries](#)

[Disability Resource Center](#)

[Gender and Sexuality Center](#)

[Office of the Vice Provost for Diversity](#)

[Religious Workers Association](#)

[The Inclusive Collective](#)

[UIC Dialogue Initiative](#)

[Women's Leadership and Resource Center](#)

[Upcoming Events for Centers for Cultural Understanding and Social Change](#)