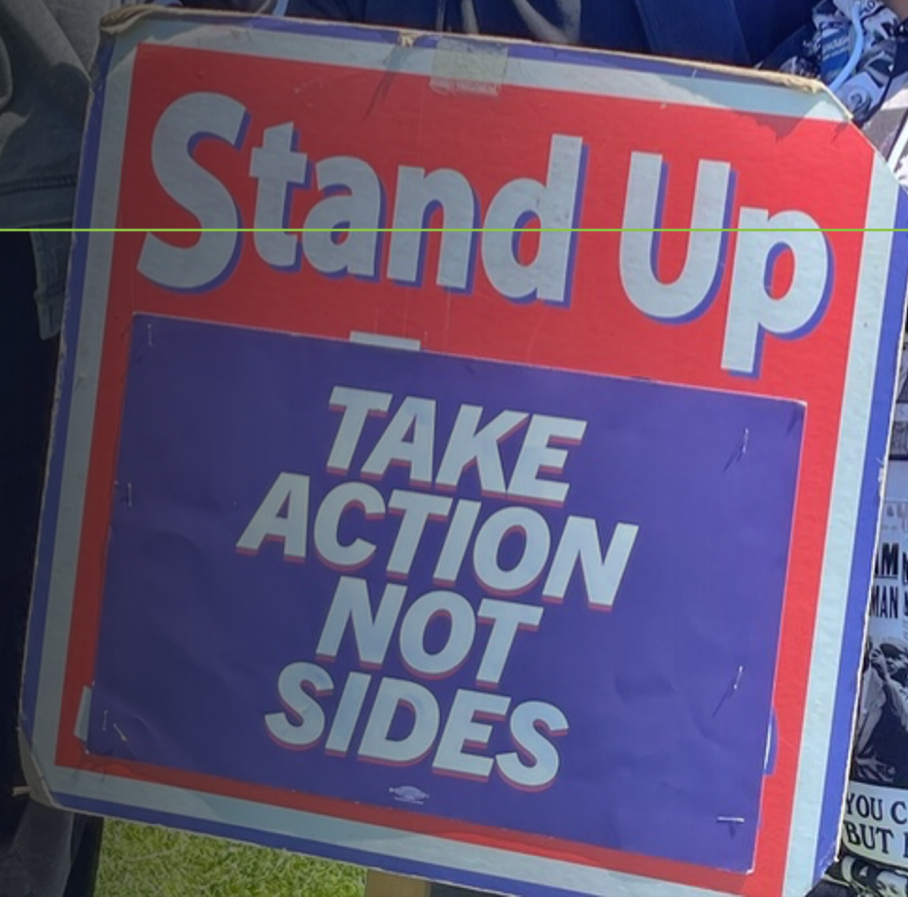


Addressing Racial Trauma Among Asian American Men Using Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)

By Phillip Cha, MFT



That's me!
(and my long Covid hair)



Dedicated to Mattie Scott



DISCLOSURES

Disclosures & Disclaimers

- **Phillip Cha, LMFT**, works at UCSF Citywide Case Management, an outpatient clinic providing intensive case management services for people living with serious mental disorders in San Francisco, California. He also maintains a private practice as a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and occasionally provide consultations and trainings for clinicians.
- The ideas expressed in this presentation solely reflect the views of Phillip Cha
- This presentation does not address issues pertaining to Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities
- "Asian American men" refers to men of East Asian origins (Korea, Japan, China)
- I use the term "Asian American men" lightly, as I recognize that race and gender are socially constructed

TODAY'S OUTLINE

PART I: DIAGNOSING THE CULTURAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF RACIAL TRAUMA FOR ASIAN AMERICAN MEN

- **Methodology**
- **Definitions: racial trauma, Asian American men , ACT**
- **The role of language in racial trauma**
- **Historically-based stereotypes of Asian American men**
- **Six ways that Asian American men might internalize racial trauma from a language-based ACT perspective**
- **Case Study: a personal experience**

METHODOLOGY



My Methodology:

- **Autoethnography**
 - A qualitative research approach to understanding cultural practices through the use of the Self.
- **A Case Study Approach (using ACT)**
 - Research method used to generate an in-depth understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011)
- **Imagination** (see Toni Morrison)

In summary, my method can be described as an Autoethnographic, psychological Case Study with a touch of imagination

Limitations of this Presentation...



Phillip Cha (younger version)

East Asian (I am Korean), 1.7 generation

Cis gender male (pronouns he/him)

Straight / married

Child of immigrant parent (mother)

Christian / Buddhist / agnostic

Graduate education

Able-bodied (currently)

Middle aged

DEFINITIONS

DEFINITION

1

Racial Trauma



Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

Racial Trauma

Comas-Diaz, Hall, and Neville (2019)

-
- Racial trauma refers to the events of danger related to real or perceived experience of racial discrimination against black, indigenous, and people of color.
 - These include threats of harm and injury, humiliating and shaming events, and witnessing harm to other BIPOC folks
 - Devastating long-term health consequences

TRAUMA EVENTS INCLUDE...

Historical & Multi-generational
(e.g., Internment of Japanese Americans during WWII)

Family
(e.g., domestic violence, IPV)



Adverse Childhood Experiences
(e.g., parental neglect, bullying)

Individual
(e.g., verbal or physical assault)

Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

HEALTH CONSEQUENCES:

Stroke

Cancer

Heart disease

Respiratory disease



Problematic drug use

Depression

Suicide

Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

INTERSECTIONALITY



Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

CUMULATIVE IMPACT!

Racial trauma includes...



Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

"internalization" of racist stereotypes

DEFINITION

2

Asian American Men

A bronze statue of Confucius, depicted with a long, flowing beard and a traditional topknot hairstyle. He is shown in a contemplative pose, with his hands clasped near his chin. The statue is set against a vibrant red background featuring large, stylized gold Chinese characters. The lighting is warm, highlighting the texture of the bronze and the depth of the red.

CONFUCIUS (b. 551 BCE)



Happy Family,
Happy Society!

CHINA

TAIWAN

KOREA

VIETNAM

JAPAN



FILIAL PIETY

PATRIARCHAL

SOCIAL HARMONY



FILIAL PIETY

OTHER-CENTERED

PATRIARCHAL

RESPONSIBILITY

SOCIAL HARMONY

SHAME



CNN

What we know about the suspect in the Monterey Park massacre

The 72-year-old man suspected of killing 11 people and wounding nine others in a shooting at a dance studio in Monterey Park, California,...

Jan 23, 2023



NPR

A gunman killed 7 people in shootings in Half Moon Bay, California

A man killed seven people at two landscaping nurseries in Half Moon Bay in San Mateo County, south of San Francisco, on Monday,...

Jan 23, 2023



Domestic violence: American Style

The New York Times

The New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com> › 2007/04/22

Before Deadly Rage, a Life Consumed by a Troubling ...

Apr 22, 2007 — **Seung-Hui Cho** was sullen and brooding from a young age. He acted, a neighbor recalled, "like he had a broken heart."



DEFINITION

3

Acceptance and Commitment Training (ACT)

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy* in one sentence...

ACT is a 3rd generation Behavior Therapy that utilizes acceptance and change processes to facilitate engagement toward values and meaningful goals while making room for a variety of psychological experiences that may get in the way.

alternatively known as **Acceptance and Commitment Training (when used outside of the therapy context)*



Efficacy of ACT

- Over 1, 045 randomized controlled trials around the world (as of 2023)
- Evidence for effectiveness for a wide variety of problems: depression, PTSD, anxiety, OCD, burnout, smoking, diabetes, chronic pain, substance use, and many more.
- Shown to decrease stigma and promote pro-social behavior and can be used in a variety of social settings



ACT AS AN “INDIGENOUS” ASIAN RESOURCE?

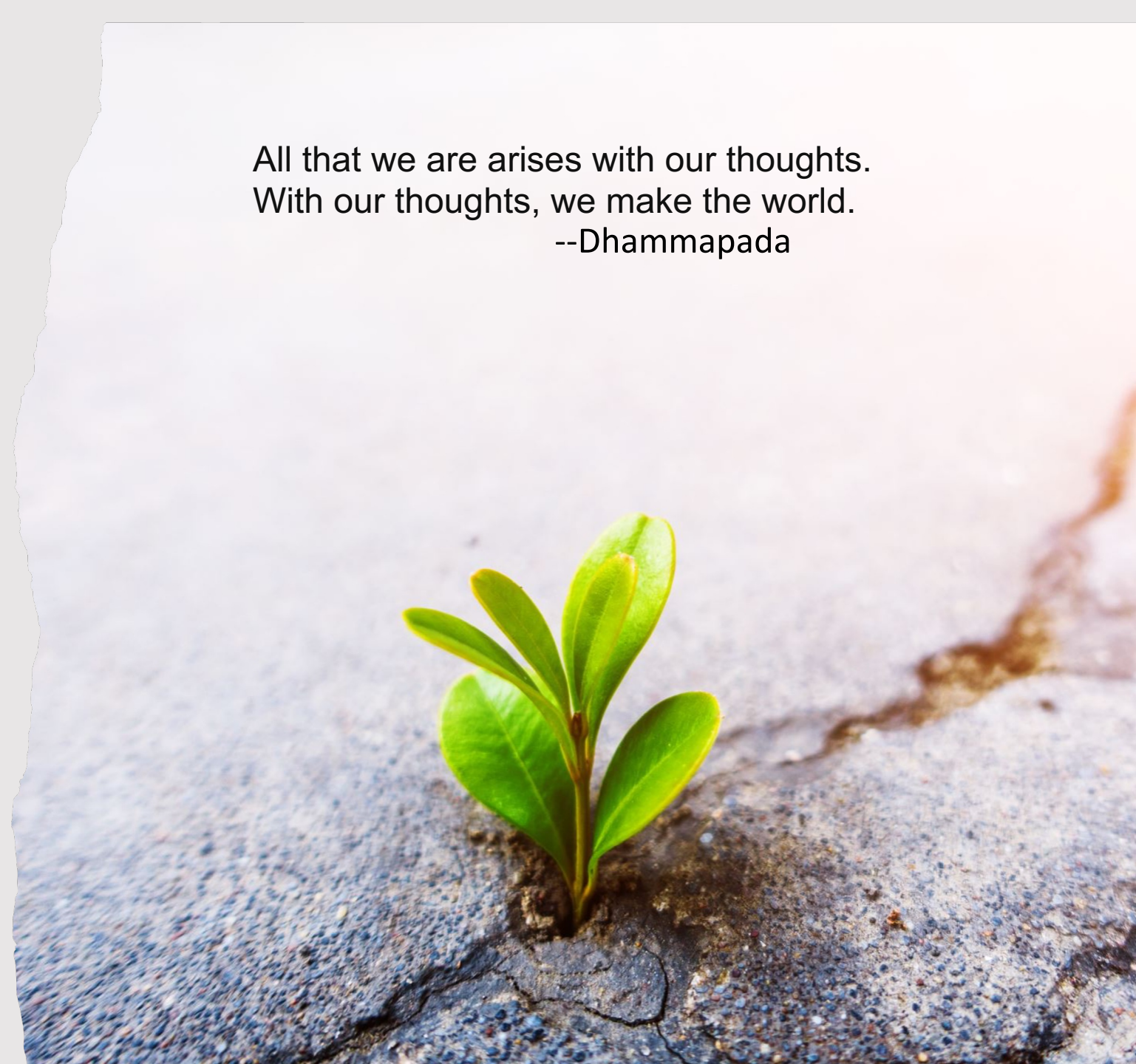
- ACT is compatible with the contemplative traditions (e.g., Christian mysticism)
- Some ACT practitioners have noted remarkable similarities between the principles of ACT & Buddhist tenets (Fung, 2015)
- ACT is action-oriented and less “talky”
- ACT is non-pathologizing



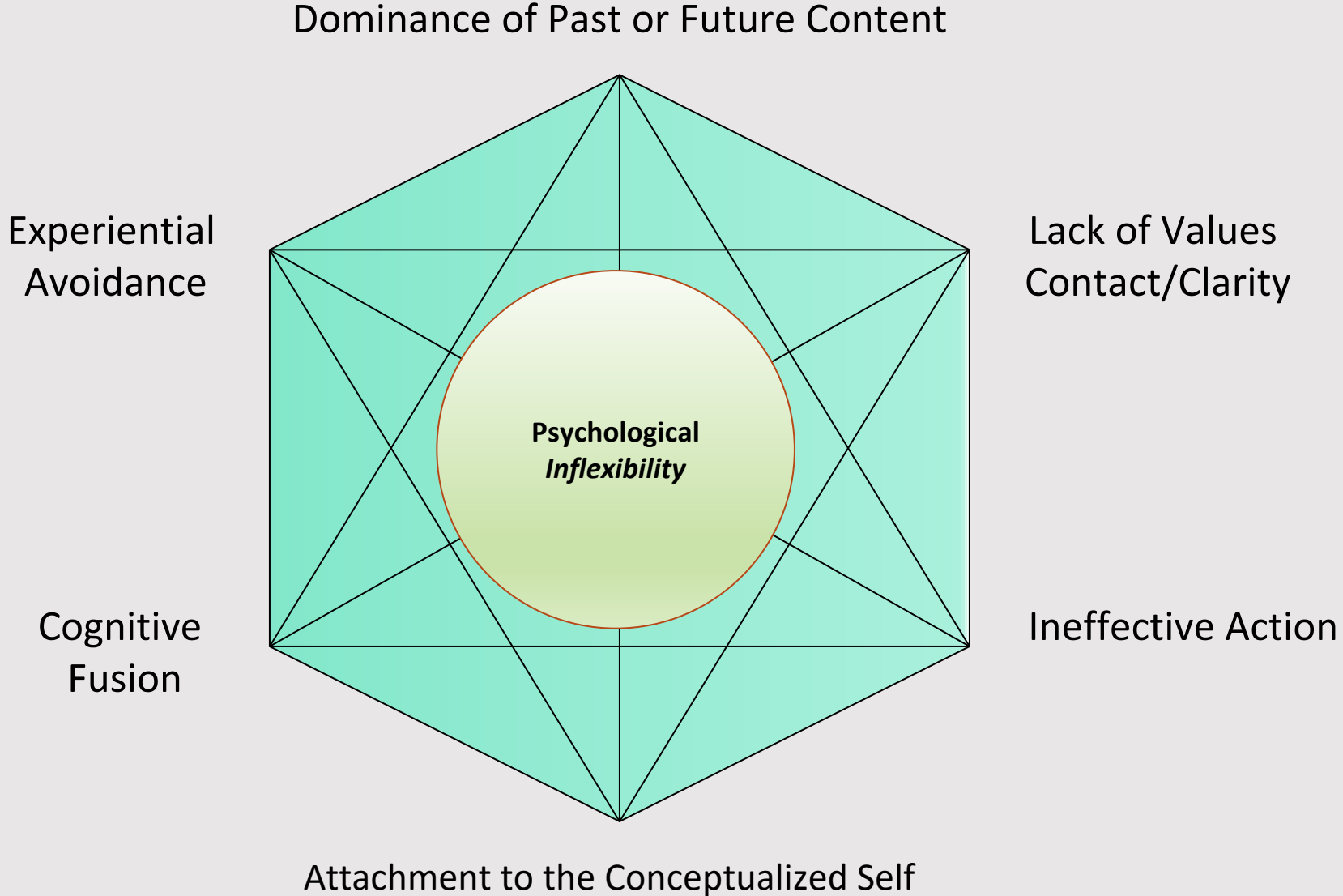
ACT AND THE PITFALLS OF LANGUAGE

ACT is based on a behavioral theory of language called **relational frame theory** that posits that human verbal behavior (or language) is a double-edged sword: it can lead to human achievement & creativity but can also lead to suffering.

All that we are arises with our thoughts.
With our thoughts, we make the world.
--Dhammapada



SIX WAYS IN WHICH LANGUAGE CAN LEAD TO SUFFERING ("Psychological Inflexibility")



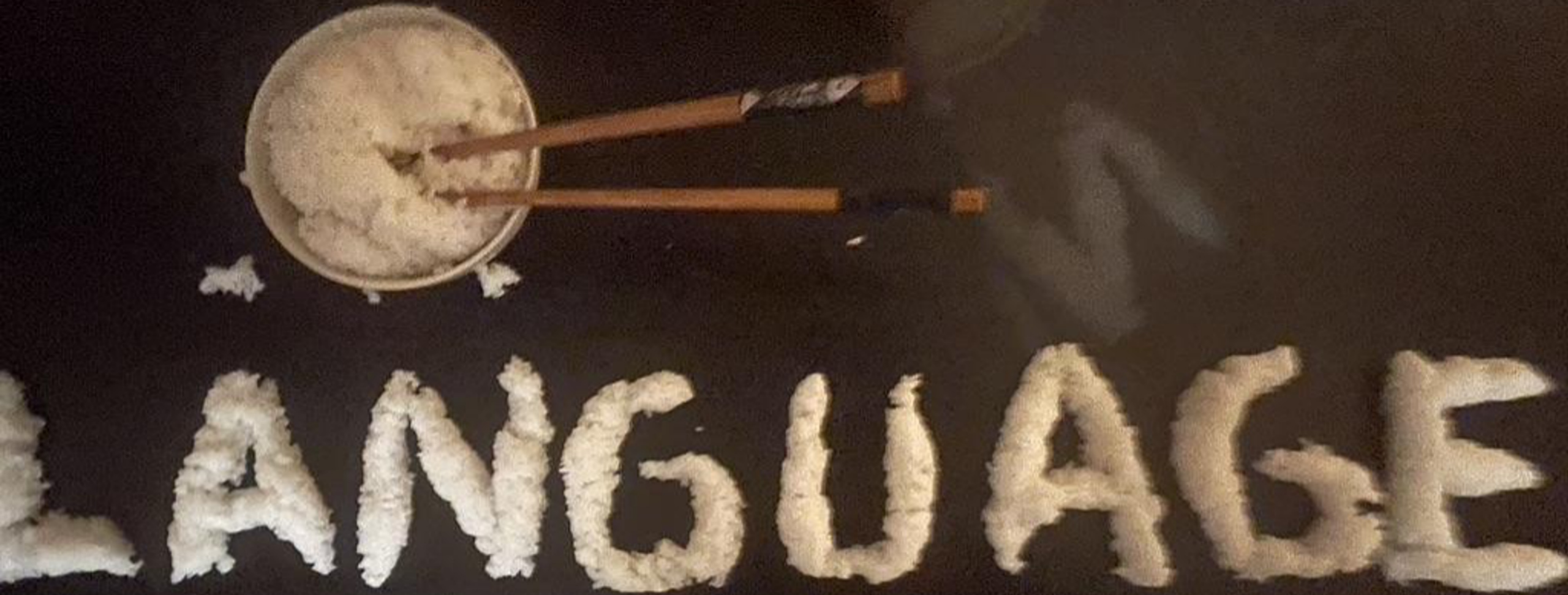
LANGUAGE & HUMAN SUFFERING

Language is like
sticky rice



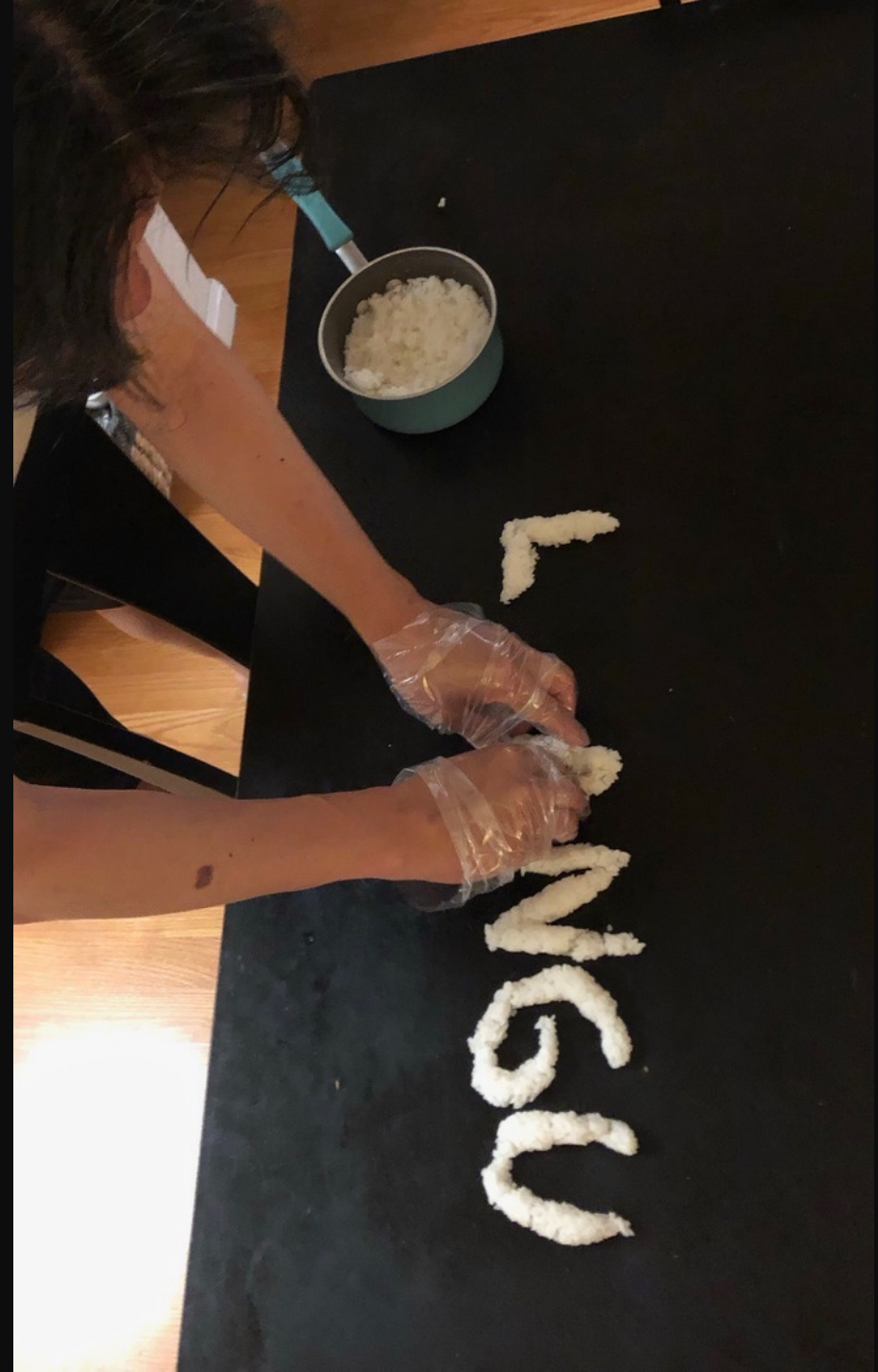
Each thought is like a grain of rice that attracts another grain





...and continues to combine and grow

LANGUAGE IS SOCIALLY
CONSTRUCTED AND SYMBOLIC.
YET IT CAN TAKE ON THE
FUNCTIONS OF "REALITY"



Relational Frame Theory

(Verbal/symbolic context)

- Through verbal skills, we can learn to ‘relate’ anything with anything else (symbolically)
- This behavior of ‘relating’ leads to new “functions” or meaning (e.g., categorizing, comparing, problem-solving, and other abilities) that can be a curse and a blessing given its arbitrary nature.
- Various forms of relating (or ‘relational framing’) have been identified in research with humans

What Language Can Do:

- Organize
- Discriminate
- Problem Solve
- Reason Giving
- Comparing
- Traveling through space/places
- Take on various perspectives
- Label things
- Create rules to follow
- Time “travel” (e.g., ruminate about the past)
- Create stories about ourselves

HOW LANGUAGE CAN HURT: RACIAL STEREOTYPES

Stereotype Threat

Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans

C M Steele ¹, J Aronson

Affiliations + expand

PMID: 7473032 DOI: [10.1037//0022-3514.69.5.797](https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.69.5.797)

Abstract

Stereotype threat is being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one's group. Studies 1 and 2 varied the stereotype vulnerability of Black participants taking a difficult verbal test by varying whether or not their performance was ostensibly diagnostic of ability, and thus, whether or not they were at risk of fulfilling the racial stereotype about their intellectual ability. Reflecting the pressure of this vulnerability, Blacks underperformed in relation to Whites in the ability-diagnostic condition but not in the nondiagnostic condition (with Scholastic Aptitude Tests controlled). Study 3 validated that ability-diagnosticity cognitively activated the racial stereotype in these participants and motivated them not to conform to it, or to be judged by it. Study 4 showed that mere salience of the stereotype could impair Blacks' performance even when the test was not ability diagnostic. The role of stereotype vulnerability in the standardized test performance of ability-stigmatized groups is discussed.

FINDINGS IN THE STUDY: .

- When a verbal test is introduced as diagnostic of ability, blacks tend to perform worse than whites (corrected for SAT scores.) When the test is not introduced in this way, the correlation disappears.

Steele, Claude M.; Aronson, Joshua (1995). "Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* **69** (5): 797–811.

‘What makes you susceptible is caring about doing well’: Claude Steele on stereotype threat

On this episode of "School's In," how the fear of confirming a negative stereotype can hurt students' performance.

February 5, 2018

SHARE:



PRINT



Students who are affected by stereotypes can underperform despite being highly qualified in a particular area, according to GSE emeritus professor Claude Steele. (Photo: Steve Debenport/Getty Images)

Negative stereotypes about race, age, gender, religion, even the region of the country

Dr. Fu Manchu



is Karloff as Fu Manchu in the 1932
The Mask of Fu Manchu



Wilder as Mr. Yunioshi in "Breakfast at Tiffany's."



Chinese Immigrant Workers (1863)



Chinese immigrant workers building
the **first transcontinental railroad**

Circa 1863, Wikipedia

Forty seventh

Congress of the United States, At the First Session,

begun and held at the CITY OF WASHINGTON, in the DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, on Monday the Fifth day of December, a/foresaid and eighth, 1882.

Dec. 5th

To execute certain treaty stipulations relating to Chinese.

Whereas, In the opinion of the Government of the United States the coming of Chinese laborers to this country endangers the good order of certain localities within the territory thereof: Therefore, Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That from and after the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and until the expiration of five years next after the passage of this act, the coming of Chinese laborers to the United States, and the same is hereby, suspended; and during such suspension it shall not be lawful for any Chinese laborer to come, or, having so come, after the expiration of said ninety days, to remain within the United States.

Sec. 2. That the master of any vessel who shall knowingly bring within the United States on such vessel, and land or permit to be landed, any Chinese laborer, from any foreign port or place, shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not more than five hundred dollars for each and every such Chinese laborer so brought, and may be also imprisoned for a term not exceeding one year.

Sec. 3. That the two foregoing sections shall not apply to Chinese laborers who were in the United States on the seventeenth day of November, eight hundred and eighty, or who shall have come into the same before the expiration of ninety days next after the passage of this act, and who shall produce

The Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)

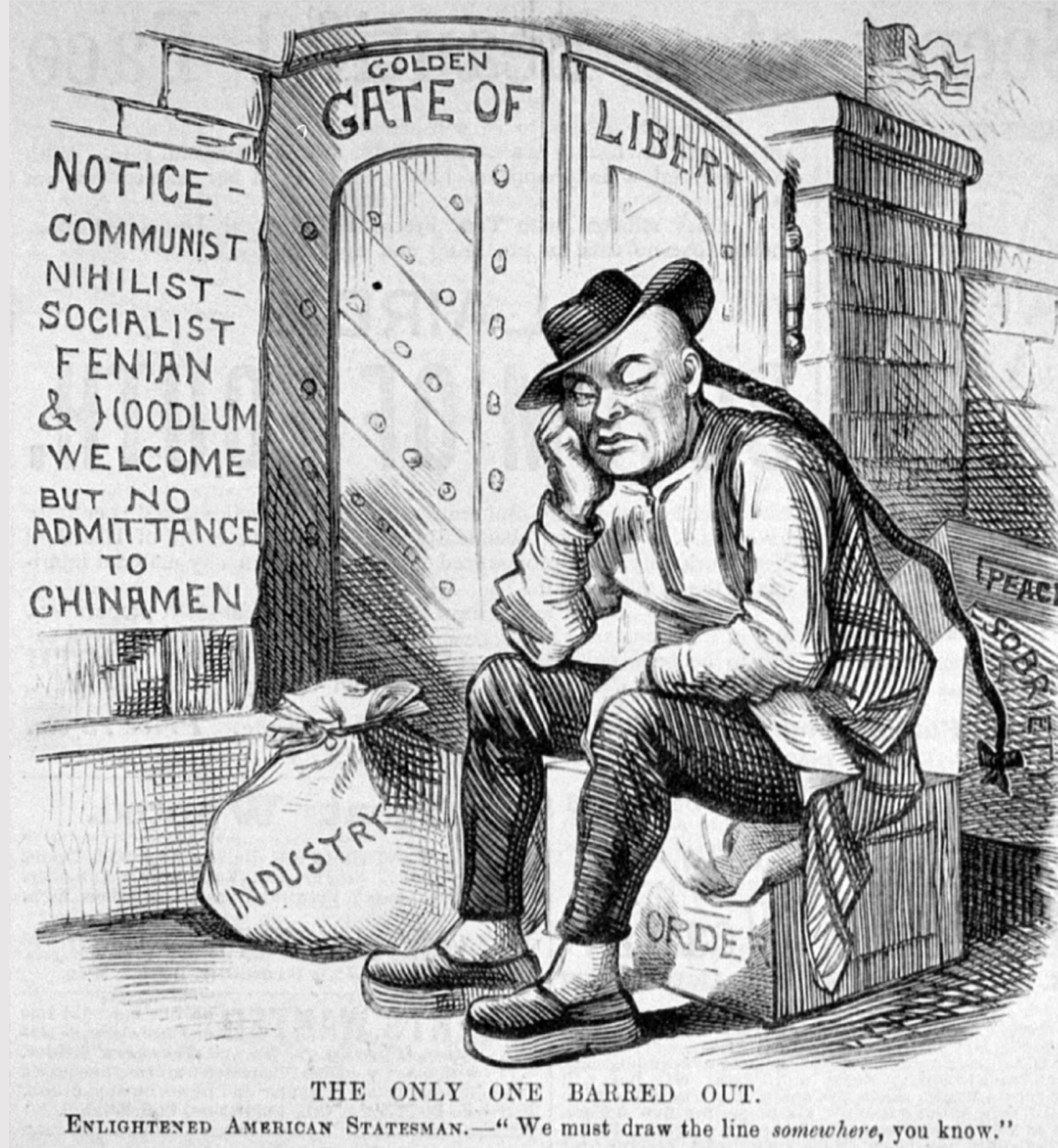
Perpetual Foreigner Stereotype



"Uncle Sam Kicks out the Chinaman" (1886)

<https://www.retrosnapshots.com/1880s-magic-washer-illustrated-advertising-poster.html>

Chinamen Barred from Entry

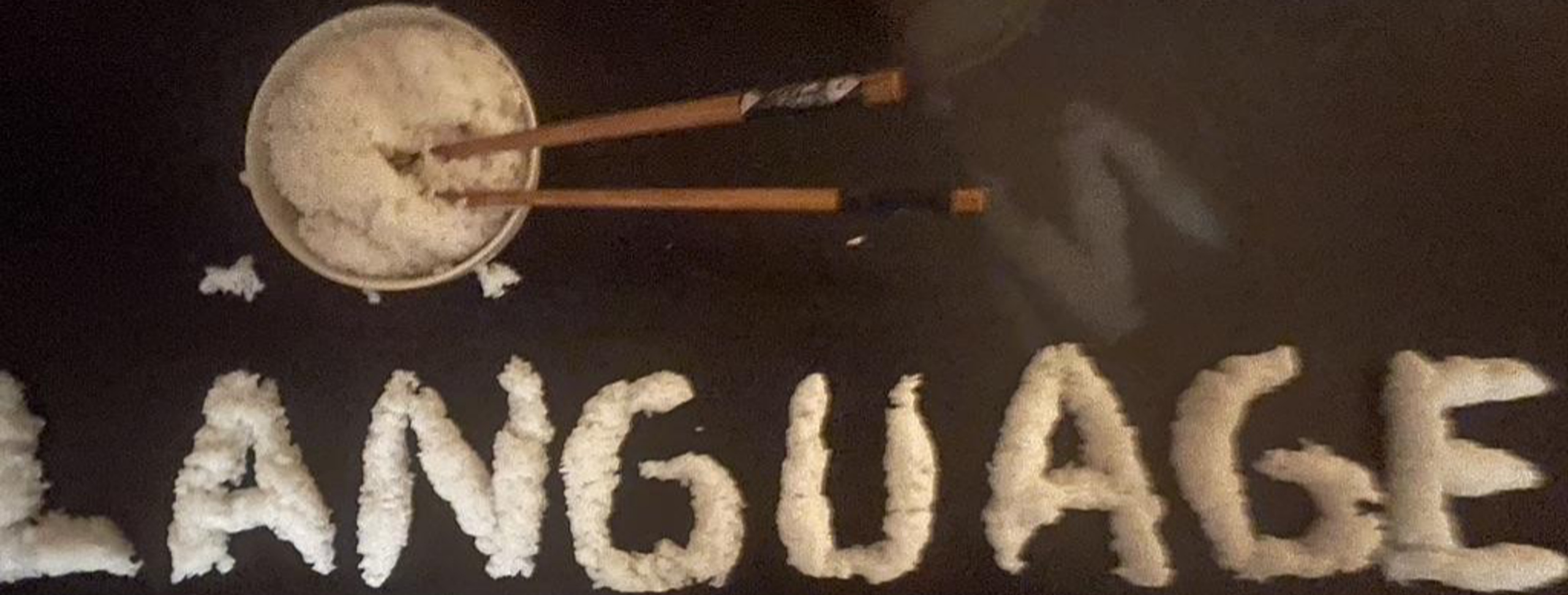


- [Public Domain](#)
- File:Chineseexclusionact.JPG
- Created: 1 January 1882

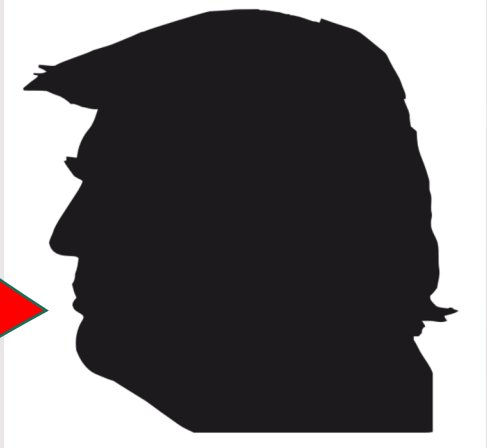
The Yellow Peril Stereotype



Japanese American citizens at an internment camp in the Pacific Northwest during World War II



Back to “Sticky Rice” and Relational Frame Theory




wp The Washington Post

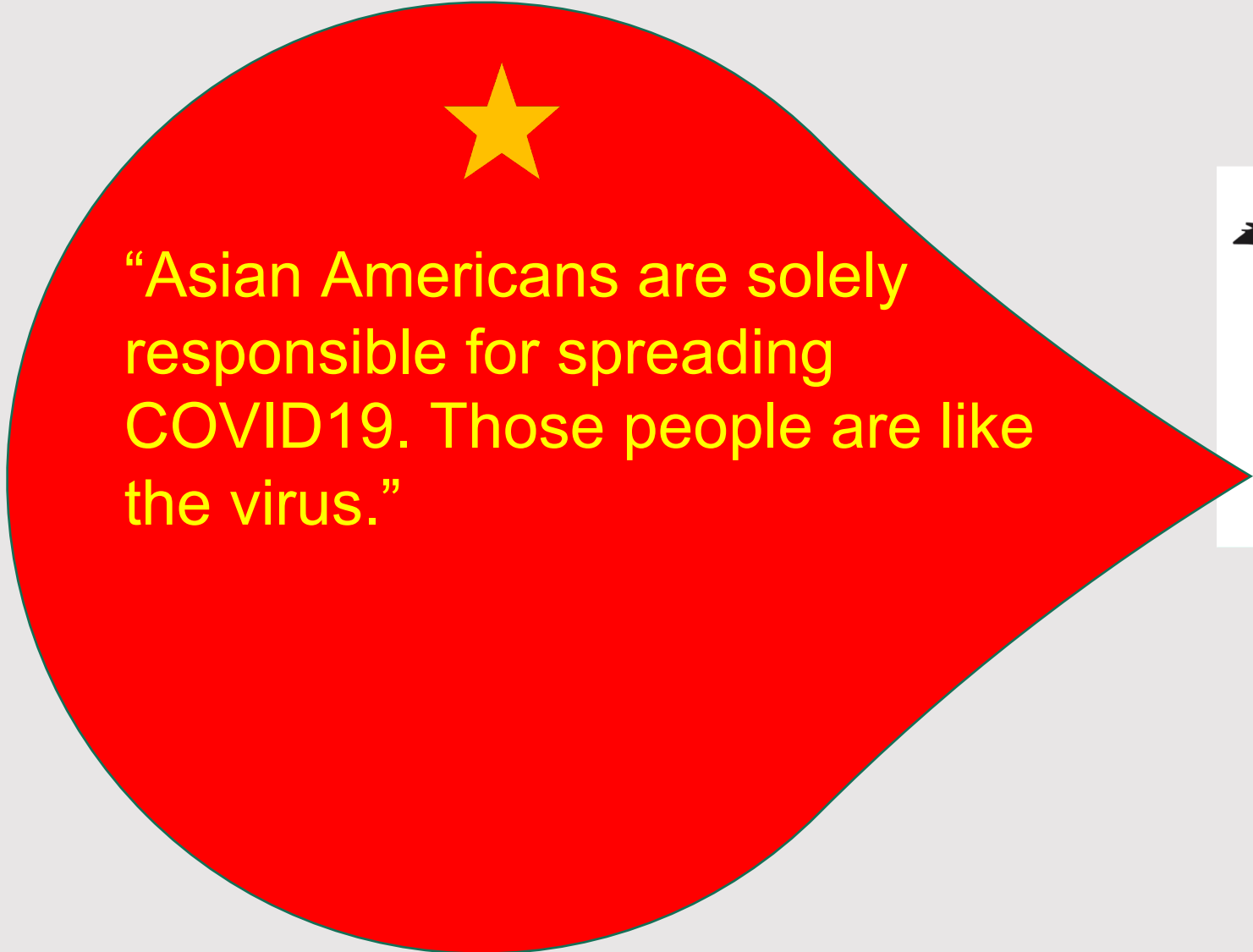
Racist anti-Asian hashtags spiked after Trump first tweeted 'Chinese virus,' study finds

On March 16, 2020, he first tweeted the phrase "Chinese virus." ... Witnesses, police paint a picture of a murderous rampage that took 8 lives.

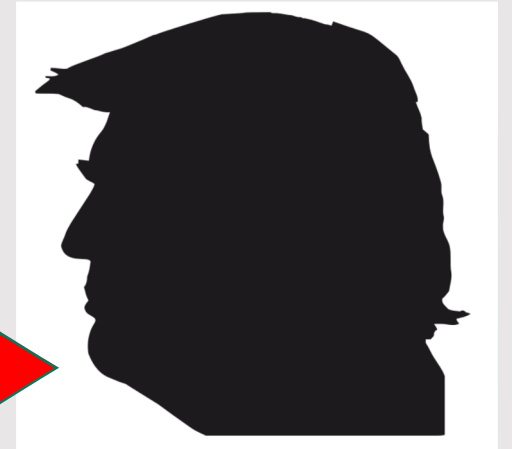
1 month ago

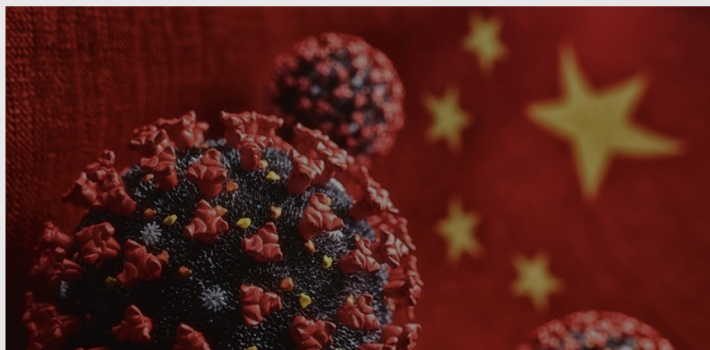


He never **explicitly** said this...



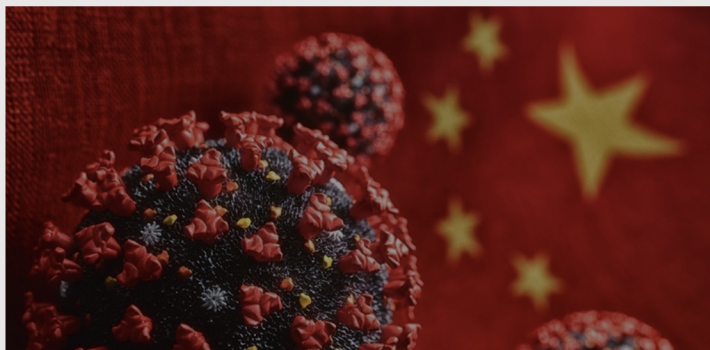
“Asian Americans are solely responsible for spreading COVID19. Those people are like the virus.”



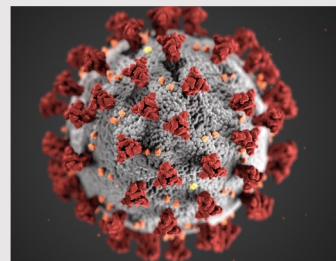


“CHINESE VIRUS”

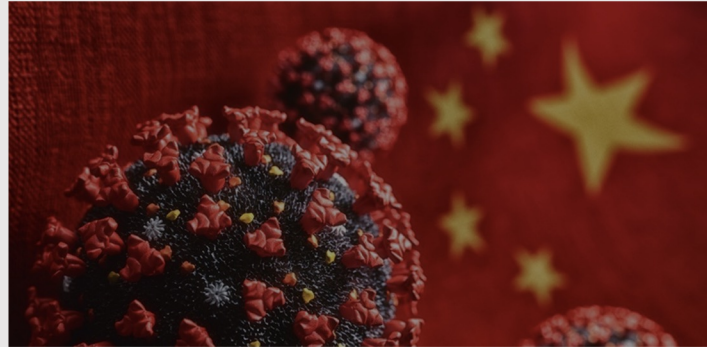




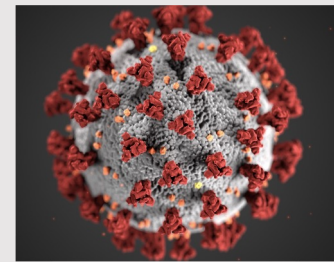
“CHINESE VIRUS”



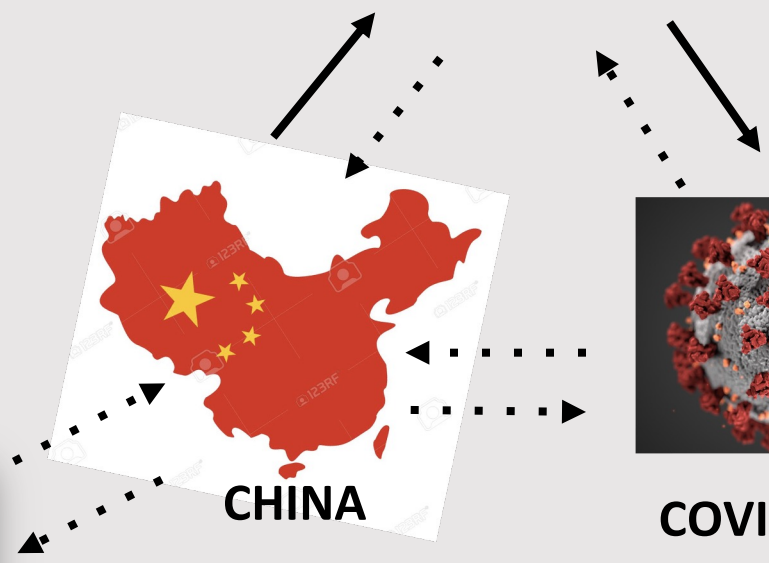
COVID 19

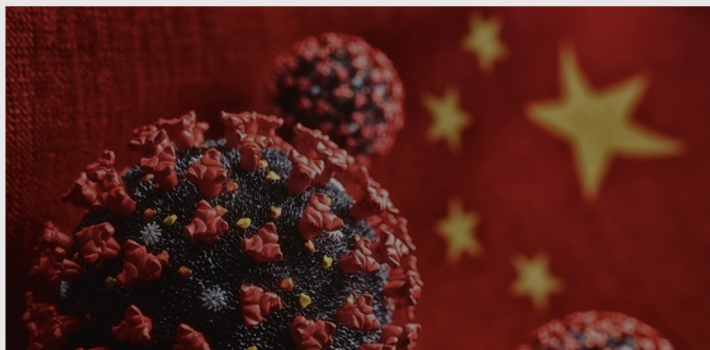


“CHINESE VIRUS”



COVID 19





“CHINESE VIRUS”

Through derived relations, I've turned into a virus



COVID 19





Photo by Phillip Cha (March 2021, "Rise Up" rally in San Francisco)

Phillip Cha, MFT

STEREOTYPE THREAT & INTERNALIZATION

Emasculation



Me again!

Model Minority



Perpetual Foreigner



Yellow Peril



A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF RACIAL TRAUMA



Actual stills from video taken by Phillip Cha,
March 22, 2021



Elderly
Asian
Woman











Slow to get out of bed

I postponed hanging out with friends

I didn't want to go to work

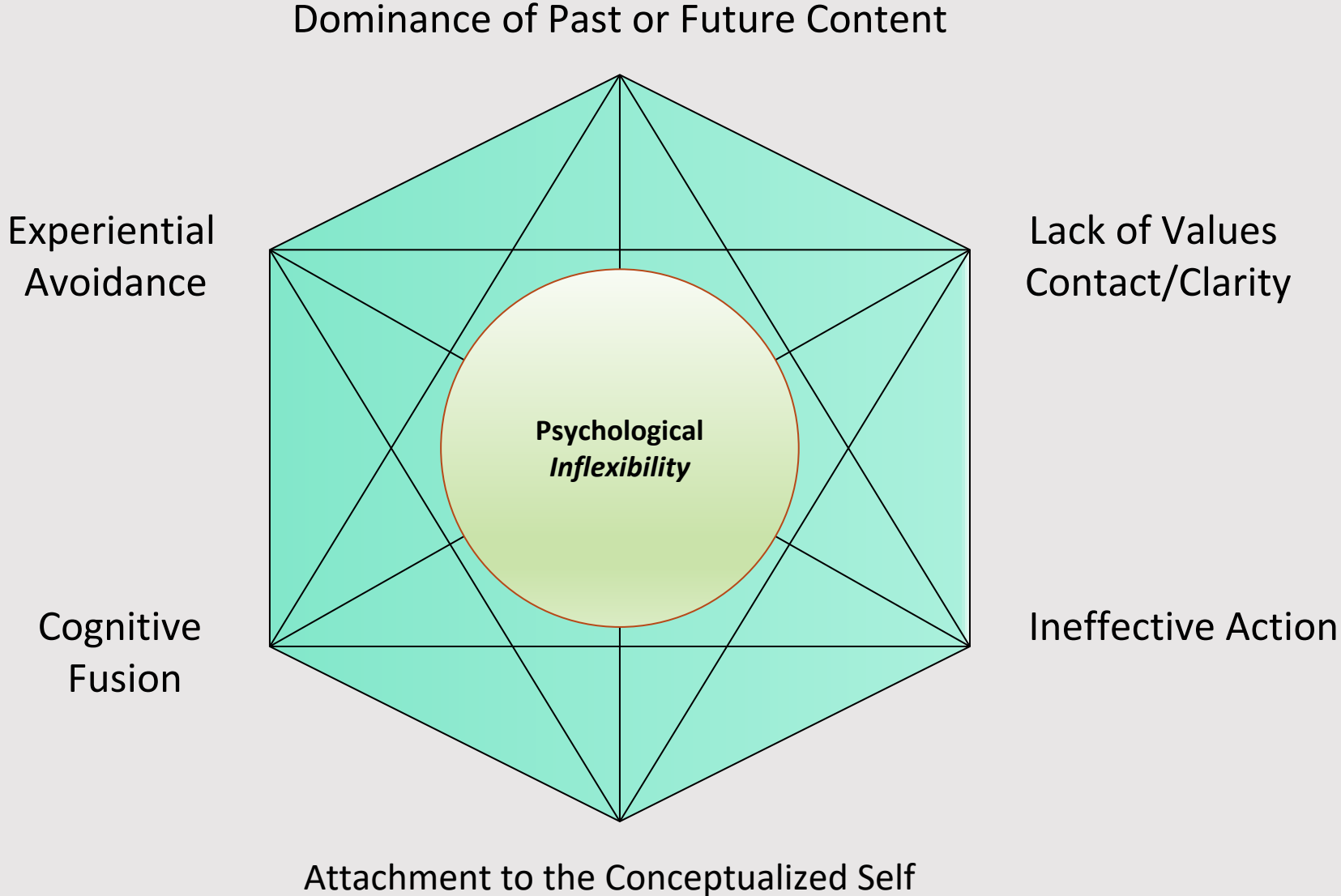
I couldn't concentrate

...afraid to ride public transportation

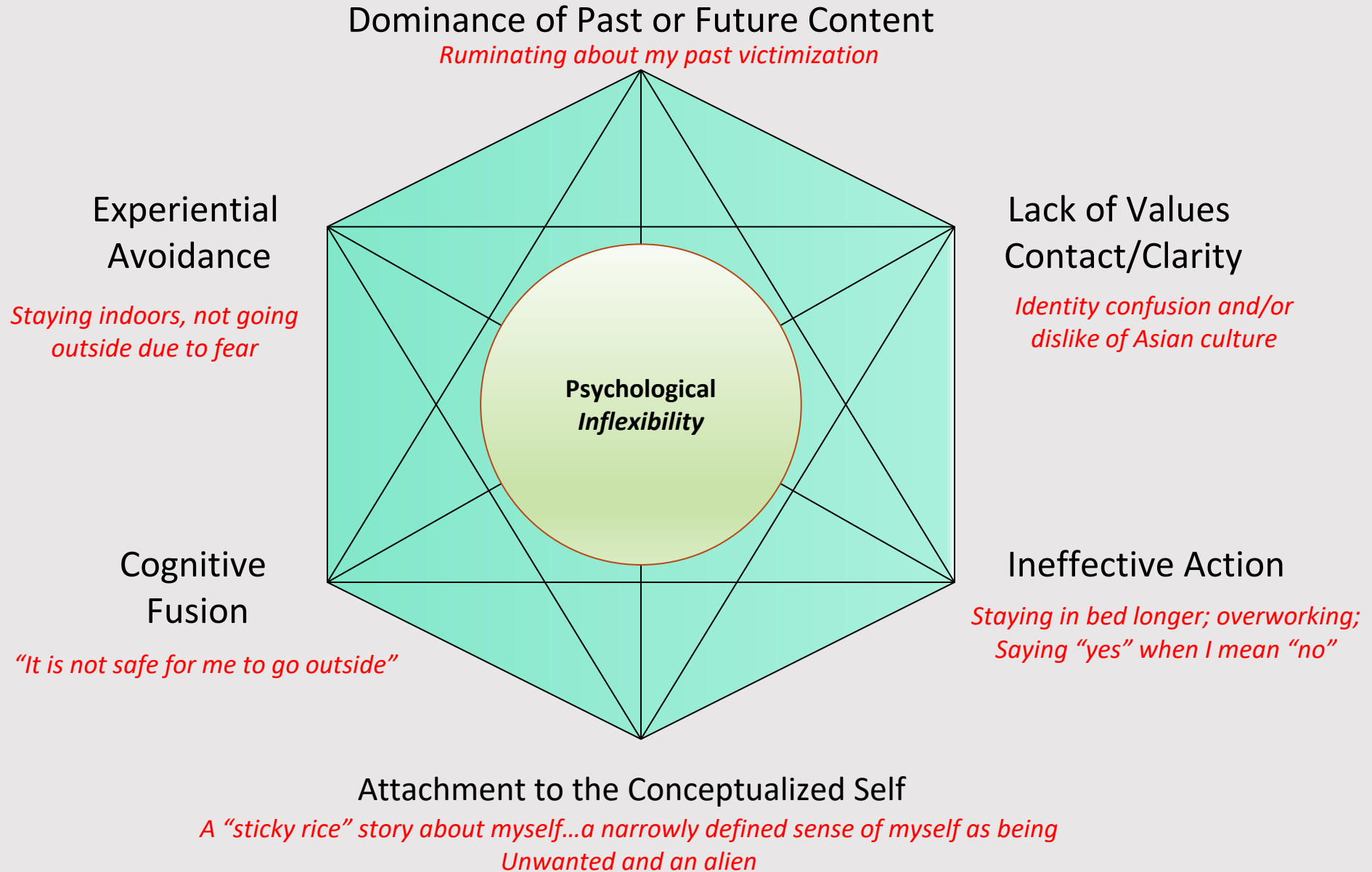
Things seemed to be moving
slowly...slow motion

I was afraid to leave the house

SIX WAYS IN WHICH LANGUAGE CAN LEAD TO SUFFERING ("Psychological Inflexibility")



HOW PHILLIP CHA INTERNALIZED RACIST STEREOTYPES VIA RELATIONAL FRAMING



THANK YOU...



*Stay tuned for Part II in
September 26th 2023*