



# The Hidden Self: Authenticity and Self-Concealment Among Asian Americans



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## Introduction

### Why Might Racial Groups Differ In...

- **Authenticity?** – Collectivist cultures' emphasis on "the good of the group" may discourage authenticity, forcing group members to shape their beliefs and behavior to fit in with the majority. People from individualistic cultures, which often emphasize uniqueness and "being yourself," may be more likely to endorse authenticity.
- **Self-concealment?** – Some cultural groups (e.g., Asians) value stoicism and cope with negative issues in private to avoid shame ("saving face"). Indeed, the norm is that hardships should be accepted without complaint ("eating bitterness").
- **This is a problem because self-concealment is also associated with poor social, physical, and mental health outcomes.** (Uysal, Lin, & Knee, 2010)
- Potentially compounding the issue, Asian Americans' self-concealment was found to be a predictor of help-seeking attitudes and confidence in mental-health practitioners. (Masuda & Boone, 2011)

### Primary Goals

- Explore what differences, if any, exist between racial groups in this area of research.
- Compare groups from an ethnically diverse geographic location in one standardized study.

## Method

### Participants (N = 161)

- **Age:** 18-57 ( $M = 22.56$ ,  $SD = 5.78$ )
- **Sex:** 82.5% were female
- **Education:** freshmen (14.9%), sophomores (19.3%), juniors (37.9%), seniors (24.8%), post-baccalaureate students (3%)
- **Racial descent:**
  - Asian (26.1%)
  - African (17.4%)
  - Caucasian (29.8%)
  - Hispanic (19.9%)
  - "Other" (6.9%)
- **Religion:** agnosticism (8%), atheism (3%), Buddhism (6.9%), Catholicism (25%), Christianity (41.3%), Hinduism (1.3%), Judaism (0.6%), Islam (8%), "Other" (5.6%)

### Procedure

- The data were taken from a larger two-part experiment on authentic responding. The analyses presented here are from baseline responses.
- Students from undergraduate psychology courses completed a set of questionnaires online (via SurveyMonkey).
- Demographic questions appeared at the end of the study to avoid priming racial identity.
- Ps who identified their race as "Other" were excluded from analyses due to low numbers.



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## Method (continued)

### Select Measures

#### Authenticity Scale

(Kernis & Goldman, 2006)

- A 45-item measure of authenticity that assesses the subscales of awareness, unbiased processing, behavioral authenticity, and relational orientation. Ps rated statements such as:
  - "I have a very good understanding of why I do the things I do."
  - "I find it very difficult to critically assess myself."
  - "I find that my behavior typically expresses my values."
  - "My openness and honesty in close relationships are extremely important to me."

#### Self-Concealment Scale

(Larson & Chastain, 1990)

- A 10-item measure that taps the extent to which individuals conceal negative aspects of themselves. Respondents rated statements such as:
  - "When something bad happens to me, I tend to keep it to myself"
  - "My secrets are too embarrassing to share with others."

## Results (continued)

### Hypothesis

Ps would vary in their self-reports of authenticity and self-concealment, according to their race.

- **Authenticity – Ps of Asian descent reported the lowest authenticity** ( $F(3,140) = 3.34$ ,  $p = .02$ )
  - Follow-up contrasts indicated that Asians differed significantly from Africans and Caucasians, but not from Hispanics.
  - Of the Authenticity Scale's four subscales, only relational orientation did not differ significantly between races.
- **Self-concealment – Ps of Asian descent reported the highest concealment** ( $F(3,144) = 4.46$ ,  $p = .005$ )
  - Follow-up contrasts indicated that Asians differed significantly from Caucasians and Hispanics, but not from Ps of African descent.

## Discussion

### Conclusions

- Cultural mores may be difficult to change, but additional awareness-building, through public-health initiatives, may help **normalize the idea of speaking up** (versus suppression) and of seeking professional counseling.
- A dissertation study showed that South Asian immigrant women were more likely to conceal from an ethnically matched interviewer. What might this mean for immigrants who seek mental health professionals but are limited to counselors of their same ethnic group, due to poor language ability? (Bhagavathula, 2004)
- For those who place less importance on mental well-being, **emphasizing its links to physical health and social well-being** may help illustrate how vital good mental health is.

### Limitations

- Ps (82.5%) were mostly female. These constructs may manifest differently in males.
- Race was measured with a single item that did not distinguish between Asian Americans, East Asians, South Asians, and other groups that may differ fundamentally.
- Acculturation, assimilation, cultural identity, time spent in America, and similar constructs were not measured in this study. Therefore, findings are quite preliminary.

## Select References

- Kernis, M., & Goldman, B. (2006). A multicomponent conceptualization of authenticity: Theory and research. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 38 (pp. 283-357). San Diego, CA US: Elsevier Academic Press.
- Larson, D. G. & Chastain, R. L. (1990). Self-concealment: Conceptualization, measurement, and health implications. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 9(4), 439-455.
- Uysal, A., Lin, H. L., & Knee, C. R. (2010). The role of need satisfaction in self-concealment and well-being. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 36, 187-199.

## Results

