



You are not alone.....**WE** are here with you

By: Jonathan W. Thompson II

Since I am not in the AAPI (Asian-American Pacific Islander) population, I was initially hesitant to write this article. I was unsure if it was my place to do so, which led me to feel a bit uncomfortable. Sitting with this discomfort, I reflected on how society has made discussions about race and culture difficult and taboo. We need to open up the dialogue and have meaningful conversations. Therefore, I am sharing some of my learning and reflections. I hope this will provide the courage to our membership to push through the discomfort in an area in which we may not have personal experience and look for ways to personally do the growth necessary to become a better person, clinician, and member of the Santa Barbara community.

AAPI is a group of people who are often lumped together; however, they are such a diverse tapestry of people. Asian-American is a term that has some history rooted in California, starting in the 1960s. On campuses, including those at the University of California, Berkeley, there was a movement for equality among those in the community considered non-White. In order to unify and have a more powerful and collective voice, the term Asian-American was born. It allowed those who traced their heritage from this area of the world to be accounted for, much like other identified groups in the United States such as African-Americans. Some Asian-Americans found this empowering, while others understood that this term is disempowering and does not have the level of inclusion that was initially sought. If we look at Asia on a map, it includes Russia and Pakistan, China and India. However, when we speak about those countries that are included in the AAPI population, it includes Japan, Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, Samoa, and Bhutan. These countries are different, yet in the United States, there is a bias that includes all of these diverse peoples under the label of AAPI. Pacific Islanders have also been included; however, they are a distinct group of people that have to wrestle with racist terms and the fight to be seen as a separate ethnic group. In the United States, there has been work to help Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders to have their own distinct way to identify themselves. This work is ongoing.

Asian-Americans also have to cope with the myth of being considered a “model minority.” This term is related to a demographic in which a higher level of achievement is often socioeconomic or educational. This “status” allows those considered in the majority to point to this group and compare it to other “outgroups.” This idea has led to extreme pressure, suicide, and guilt placed upon Asian-Americans who do not live up to the ideals that have been unjustly placed upon them.

This new wave of physical violence, discrimination, and disregard is not uncommon in the Asian-American community. Due to being considered a model minority, some people are

struggling with this new reality. Asian-Americans and Pacific Islanders need everyone, especially those in the Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color group, to stand with them to stamp out this hate. Even though the experiences in each community may differ a bit, those who are considered minorities must figure out the best way to support each other as we move toward systematically tearing down racism. Each of us must change the pervasive thinking that one group is the model for another and look toward ways to become more equitable and inclusive with the opportunities provided to create a truly just system.