Leaning in and Listening to the Latinx Community
By: Claire Blakey

As I sit here trying to type, I find myself up against a lot of resistance. Self doubt creeps in, saying, "what do I have to say about this, who am I to publish my thoughts." While writing about something I feel proficient in – for example, perinatal mental health care – comes so easily to me, somehow entering a conversation about racism and injustice leaves me feeling unqualified, speechless and nervous to begin. Yet I recognize how valuable it is to speak up as a white person, advocate for others and educate myself -- especially in a time where our voice matters and allyship is essential to change.

Here are some thoughts that help me move forward: I don't have to be an expert to engage in this conversation. When doubts creep in of "why does my voice matter," I remind myself that every change that's happened for groups of individuals who are being oppressed or mistreated begins with a group of individuals who use their privilege to speak up for those that don't have it.

Another layer that is present for me is my own lived experiences and how they impact my resistance. I Identify mainly as white, but consist of Mexican, Japanese, English, Irish and Italian heritage. My grandparents all immigrated to California from around the world. My maternal grandpa as a child from Mexico, my maternal grandmother as a young adult from Japan, and my paternal grandparents from Ireland. As a second generation American, I am a white person with history and roots in the Latinx community -- who has not identified with it very much due to how I was raised. There was a lot of shame around my Mexican roots passed down from my mom's and grandparent's generations. This is why I think a community conversation, with circles of therapists answering deeper questions could be helpful to induce articles like this. It's only through the continual introspection and reflection that I am adding this other layer. Because of the generational shame of their immigration process, my family of origin denied their Mexican roots and lineage. Thus I have not identified with being Mexican, which is a hard truth to admit.

In response to the question: what changes would I like to see in our local community in regards to the Latinx community? My answer is: I need to listen. I need to engage. I need to ask the Latinx community.

At a glance when I look at our Santa Barbara community and Latinx mental health -- I see a lack of representation. There are proportionally few licensed Latinx individuals in my community that I can refer to. When I think more deeply about that, it highlights questions: how can I individually be an ally to support Latinx pre-licensed or licensed individuals? What can SBCAMFT do as a community to amplify Latinx voices, create more opportunities and provide additional services: whether that be scholarships, guest speakers, or deepen community conversations around this topic. Instead of answering myself, I feel like I need to lean in and create space to hear from the Latinx community about what they need and to use my privilege and my voice to help make that happen.

My takeaway is this: I am here to listen and then use my voice and my privilege as the president of SBCAMFT to speak up. I'd love to support your experiences. If you feel open to connecting I am here: Today. Tomorrow. Everyday. In the same way that this required a slice of reflection and an openness to engage, I want to keep engaging. I want to further this conversation. Not sure what that looks like, but would love to hear from you too. Whether it's meeting for coffee, doing more training, more listening, more connecting. In order to keep growing and meeting the needs in our community we need to keep showing up. We need to keep asking questions, we need to keep listening to people's lived experiences and we need to use our voices to facilitate the change.

 My email is president@sbcamft.org: Please reach out to me or our Diversity Director, Jonathan Thompson at diversitydirector@sbcamft.org to start a conversation.