How did it start?

We started the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Trainee Support Group to support AAPI graduate students and postdoctoral scholars (“trainees” here onward) at the University of Rochester and to build a community. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, reported crimes against Asians in the US have risen by 150% (CBS news, 2021). This rise of anti-AAPI violence is not simply a response to the pandemic, but aligns with a long-time animosity toward AAPI in the US. AAPI persons face stereotypes including being perpetually foreign, invisible, and a “model minority.” We recognize the need for a safe space for the AAPI community at the U. of R.

AAPI at U of R

AAPI postdoctoral scholars make up 41% of the scholars at URMC as of 2021 (SMD Education Statistics and Facts). Those who identify as “Asian” make up 9% of the student population at the University of Rochester as of Fall 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics), totaling approximately one thousand students. AAPI stereotypes derived from the model minority myth include: 1) excelling academically, 2) not requiring any form of public assistance, and 3) not experiencing racism and/or not complaining about racism. The combination of the stereotypes and trainee position makes AAPI trainees more vulnerable to suffer from implicit bias. We are expected to obey superiors during training and not need much guidance from mentors, but we are also perceived to be less competent than White/American counterparts when we practice our cultural value of humility: we did not challenge our superiors in an American setting even though we were expected to not question them. AAPI trainees can benefit from support to handle these unique challenges.

Interview with So Young

I - So Young Choe, postdoctoral fellow & an Asian immigrant woman – have been experiencing attacks against AAPI women. I naïvely thought that I was no different from White/American trainees. If anything, I achieved more than White/American trainees by earning graduate degrees in a second language and publishing papers in a language that greatly differs from my mother tongue. Many men told me to cook for them (e.g., online dating interactions) and blamed me for not satisfying their needs (e.g., not organizing their birthday celebrations). Even male cohorts in academia demanded that I take care of their administrative work and support their research instead of working on my own research. I still thought they just had bad days and their behavior was not specific to me. But blatant hatred toward AAPI during COVID finally opened my eyes that those men expected me to act like the stereotypes of AAPI women: “obedient, submissive, and compliant Asian women who serve men’s and others’ wishes.” A man in his late 70s told me that his last life wish was marrying an AAPI woman (any AAPI woman) so that he would be revered by the AAPI woman.

It astonished me that he thought it was a good thing to say out loud, so lovingly (!) with dreaming eyes. Moreover, I was dismissed by White male professors who were too busy to answer me, but had enough time to get back to other White/American mentees. It does not always come from men either. Some female colleagues blamed me for not obeying them and not accommodating their wishes as well, as if I am supposed to do what they want. While spending time dealing with this minority pain and talking with people about how to handle these challenges, I thought perhaps I could use what I learned to help others in similar situations. Tina Bui-Bullock (Doctoral student) and Jia Mei (PREP student) gracially joined this initiative.

We are planning additional events to support AAPI trainees such as AAPI faculty panels and AAPI subculture events with Asian food. We are also looking for AAPI trainees to introduce to our newsletters. We hope you will subscribe to our listserv and join us. Both non-AAPI members and AAPI members are welcome, and we look forward to building this community with you.

AAPI Trainee Support Committee:
President: So Young Choe, Ph.D., Postdoctoral fellow in Psychiatry
Executive Officer: Tina Bui-Bullock, Doctoral student in Microbiology & Immunology
Secretary: Jia Mei, PREP student in Microbiology & Immunology

Sign up for our listserv here
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