

THE ASIAN AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST

The Official Newsletter of the Asian American
Psychological Association



Artist: Alicia Geng

Fall 2026 Issue

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Fall 2026

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Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this issue are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the AAPA or the newsletter editorial leadership team.

The Asian American Psychologist is the official newsletter of the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA) and is published two times annually. The newsletter serves to share perspectives of members and inform the AAPA community of relevant news and events.

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President's Column

Donna Demanarig, PhD

Mabuhay! As we close out 2026, I find myself reflecting on the first half of my presidency with deep gratitude, humility, and hope. Upon stepping into this role in January, I knew AAPA would continue to face challenges shaped by the sociopolitical realities impacting higher education and our communities. I did not anticipate just how turbulent the beginning of this year would be. Amid the uncertainty, however, I have been continually reminded of the resilience, brilliance, and heart of this community.



Our vision for AAPA centers on social justice, coalition-building, and collective care. My presidential initiatives included strengthening our relationships with our Ethnic Psychological Association (EPA) siblings, collaborating with local community partners to create initiatives that expand access to mental health care for historically marginalized communities, and building a stronger and more connected social media presence so that our organization remains visible, accessible, and engaged with members. We started this year together in Seattle, WA, at our annual retreat, which was intentionally timed alongside the National Multicultural Conference and Summit (NMCS).

Dr. Gloria Wong Padongpatt and I valued the opportunity to connect in person with EC members and division and committee members. We knew with the work ahead of us, we needed all hands on deck, and more importantly, that people felt inspired, connected, supported, and invested in our collective future. Throughout the weekend, we planned, reflected, and connected through shared meals and (lots of) laughter. It was an energizing and affirming experience that reminded me why this work matters.



While we may not always agree on every strategy or path forward, we are united in the belief that our communities are stronger together. We remain committed to protecting our members from systemic harm while uplifting one another with care, respect, and shared purpose. I am especially excited to continue these conversations as part of the EPA Presidential Plenary at our AAPA convention this October.

Early this year, we were confronted by targeted attacks following the leak of a 2024 CONREPA statement that AAPA signed on to the New York Post. Several of us in AAPA leadership, including our EPA siblings, were subjected to doxxing and accusations of antisemitism. These accusations were deeply harmful and fundamentally untrue. I continue to find it profoundly ironic that racial and ethnic minoritized groups were accused of racism when speaking out against ongoing violence and genocide. This experience clarified for me the importance of solidarity across our communities and strengthened my commitment to collective advocacy.

“We remain committed to protecting our members from systemic harm while uplifting one another with care, respect, and shared purpose.”

In response to this, I have worked more closely alongside my counterparts in the Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi), National Latinx Psychological Association (NLPA), The Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP), and the American Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Psychological Association (AMENA-Psy).



I am proud to share the progress of my Presidential Taskforce on developing research guidelines for working with APIDA communities. Co-chaired by Drs. Anne Saw and Jean-Arellia Tolentino, this extraordinary team of scholars is already engaging in meaningful and critical work. I am eager to see the impact of what they will create together and how it can shape more ethical, community-centered, and culturally responsive research practices.

There are many exciting initiatives unfolding across our organization. Our Social Justice Committee and Education and Training Council are actively developing webinars, workshops, and programming that directly support the goals of this presidency. These initiatives reflect the incredible dedication and creativity of our members, who continue to show up with passion and purpose despite the challenges faced.

As I reflect on these past months, it is incumbent of me to tell you the truth: none of this work can happen alone. Leadership is never the work of one person. I am profoundly grateful for my incredible partner in this journey, Dr. Gloria Wong-Padoongpatt, as well as Drs. Monique Kulkarni and Christine Catipon, who together make up our Quad. Their wisdom, care, labor, and friendship sustain me more than words can fully express. I am equally thankful for our Executive Committee Board, who work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that our organization continues to uphold its mission and vision with integrity and courage. So much of what we accomplish is made possible through the often unseen labor of individuals who care deeply about this community and its future.

“None of this work can happen alone.”

In moments like these, when the world can feel heavy and uncertain, I continue to believe in the power of collective action, radical care, and community. I believe in the importance of creating spaces where our members feel seen, protected, valued, and empowered to lead. And I believe that even in the face of adversity, we can continue building something meaningful together. Thank you for trusting me with the honor of serving as your president. Thank you for your labor, your compassion, your advocacy, and your belief in our shared future. I look forward to all that we will continue to build together in the months ahead.

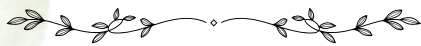
*With gratitude and
solidarity,*

*Donna Demanarig,
PhD*



A MESSAGE FROM THE CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

As we head into this second half of 2026, we hope to call in themes of transformation and resilience, as symbolized by the butterfly on the cover art. The butterfly, in many ways, reflects the journeys of our community, shaped by migration, adaptation, resilience, and hope. We invite these themes to reflect on not just who we are as individuals, but on who we are as the AAPA community. We are all shaped by our histories, families, cultures, resilience, and dreams. Let this be a reminder that our diversity is what makes us beautiful and powerful. In the face of rising anti-immigrant sentiment in the media, we can continue to strengthen and uplift one another, highlight the beauty of immigration and diversity, and honor the many transformational generations that have brought each of us here. Let us choose solidarity as one unified APIDA community!



Another exciting update: We have three new members on the newsletter team:

Sinchan Mishra is a copy editor on the newsletter team. She is currently majoring in Psychological and Brain Sciences with a minor in Applied Psychology at UC Santa Barbara, with the aim of one day pursuing a PhD in Clinical or Health Psychology. Her research interests center on the mind-body connection, cultural influences on support seeking, and positive psychology. She is excited to combine her experiences with journalism, research, and advocacy to contribute to the AAPA newsletter. In her free time, she enjoys reading historical fiction novels, trying new recipes, and planning her next vacation.



Linh-Nhu Hoang
Senior Editor



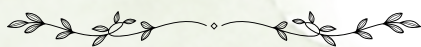
Alicia Geng
Junior Editor

Ghazal Sajeev is a recent Psychological and Brain Sciences graduate from UC Santa Barbara with a minor in Applied Psychology. She has built experience in crisis intervention, clinical research, and direct work with youth. She plans to pursue a PsyD in Clinical Psychology with a focus on trauma, youth mental health, and culturally responsive care.

Kaavya Saini (she/her) recently graduated with her bachelor's in Psychological and Brain Sciences from UC Santa Barbara, where she also minored in Applied Psychology and Spanish. Her research interests center on how structural injustice shapes psychological outcomes, and she hopes to pursue a doctoral degree in psychology. In her free time, Kaavya enjoys Shaolin kung fu, reading, and cooking.



We are so lucky to feature some insightful articles from our amazing AAPA members. Our AAPA President, Dr. Donna Demanarig, shared a thoughtful reflection with gratitude, emphasizing AAPA's commitment to social justice, coalition building, collective care, and culturally responsive work for APIDA communities. She also highlighted the strength of our community, furthering our theme of resilience, especially facing political turbulence, targeted attacks, and uncertainty.



We are also grateful for Melody Mann and Manasa Swaminathan's insightful piece that highlighted the gaps in research and practice for addressing suicidal ideation among Punjabi Americans. They call for community-grounded, culturally sensitive interventions that center their lived experiences, storytelling, and collective healing. Andy Huynh also shared a beautifully written poem, "Explosive Emotions", to honor the lived experiences of suppressed grief, sadness, and anger as sacred pathways toward healing ancestral and community wounds. We also have an inspiring story of our president, Dr. Donna Demanarig, from an interview conducted by Dr. Michi Fu and written by Dr. Sue Kim, showcasing Dr. Demanarig's personal journey in activism and commitment to community-centered research and fighting oppression for future generations.

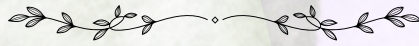
INTERESTED IN BECOMING A CO-EDITOR IN CHIEF?

Are you looking for an opportunity to build on your leadership experience *and* contribute to our AAPA community in a creative way?

Come join our AAPA Newsletter Team
as a
Co-Editor in Chief!

If you are interested in this unique and exciting opportunity, please send your CV and/or portfolio to newsletter@aapaonline.org.

We are honored to have Dr. Martha Merchant share a touching reflection on her experiences at the 3rd annual Convention of Asian Pacific American Feminist Psychology. We are also delighted to spotlight our member, Abigail Saavedra, who shared her AAPA journey and some reflections on her career thus far. The Other Ones by Lee (brothers Martin and Richard Lee) shared an amazing comic featuring a young adopted Korean American raised by white parents and a second-generation Korean American raised by Korean parents, touching on xenophobia and the perpetual foreigner stereotype.



Keep an eye out for some exciting updates from DMAA on their awards showcase, clinical consultation event, and collaboration with the Division on LGBTQQ. Also stay tuned for the DMAA event at the AAPA Convention in October 2026.

Thank you to **all of our contributors** to this edition of the newsletter. Please enjoy these offerings, and do remember to take care of yourself and one another!



AAPA FINANCE OFFICERS' REPORT

AAPA's Co-Finance Officers (FOs), Soyeong Kim and Flora Surjadi, are pleased to share the financial status of our organization. As of July 15, 2025, our total combined balance across Chase and PayPal stands at \$748,727.06. After accounting for fiscal agent accounts and AAPA Division balances, the main account holds a working capital of \$576,710.80.

We are happy to share the following updates with AAPA membership:

- **2025 Budget Approved.** The Executive Committee has officially voted and approved the budget for 2025.
- **Disbursement of Dues.** We have disbursed the division dues for 2025. Division Chairs and Finance Officers should find this reflected in their respective division ledgers.
- **Taxes.** AAPA's 2024 taxes were submitted on time!
- **Investment Update.** A portion of AAPA's funds has been invested in a Chase Certificate of Deposit (CD) account, resulting in earnings of \$14,044.25 since 2024.

Note: This report was taken from the Spring 2026 Issue.



Membership Officers' Report

Hello AAPA!

As of May 15, 2026, AAPA has 1,585 members. Student members continue to comprise the majority of our membership. See the table at the bottom of the page for a breakdown of our members by membership category. If you have any questions or concerns regarding AAPA membership, please do not hesitate to contact membership@aapaonline.org.

Membership Reminders:

- As an AAPA member, you can edit your membership account by logging into your account on aapaonline.org. If you cannot remember your password, there is an option to reset it. Once you are logged in, you can update your account information, such as your email address, mailing address, payment information, etc.
- Your AAPA membership lasts for a year from the date you signed up and will automatically be renewed after the year is complete. If you wish to cancel your membership, you may log into your account prior to the renewal date to do so.
- At the time of renewal, please remember to update your membership category if you have transitioned from student to professional (or professional to retiree/emeritus).

If you wish to change your division memberships, please contact us at membership@aapaonline.org so that we may assist in this process.

Thank you for your continued support of AAPA! We hope to see you at Convention or another AAPA event!

Best wishes,

Jess Benson & Lisa Liu
AAPA Membership Team

Membership Category	# of Current Members
Student	900
Professional	673
Retiree/Emeritus	12



ASIAN AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOLOGY **2026 Editorial Fellows**



Dr. Han Na Lee

Dr. Han Na Lee (she/her) is an assistant professor of Counseling Psychology at Iowa State University. She received her PhD in Counseling Psychology and a certificate in Measurement & Quantitative Methodology from Loyola University Chicago. Her research centers on understanding how racism and structural oppression shape mental health and social relationships, with a particular focus on Asian American and immigrant communities. Grounded in critical and contextual frameworks, her work focuses on both risk and resilience processes, moving beyond individual-level explanations of wellbeing.

As a multicultural and multilingual scholar, Dr. Lee is deeply committed to community-engaged scholarship and culturally responsive intervention. She currently serves as a board member of the Korean American Wellness (KAWA), where she contributes to developing and evaluating community-based mental health programs. Her research, teaching, advocacy, and community work are integrated to work towards the goal to improve collective wellbeing of Asian American communities.

As an Editorial Fellow for the Asian American Journal of Psychology (AAJP), she engages in scholarly reviewing and editorial mentorship aimed at strengthening methodological rigor and theoretical clarity in Asian American mental health research. Through this fellowship, she hopes to further integrate community-engaged research, attend to systemic determinants of wellbeing, and contribute to collaborative efforts that translate research into meaningful impact.



Thomas Le

Thomas Le is an assistant professor of Psychology at Bryn Mawr College. Within a liberation

psychology and intersectional framework, the goal of their research is to understand both the individual and structural factors that promote mental wellbeing among marginalized communities, with an emphasis on Asian Americans and LGBTQ+ people of color. His research also investigates how factors related to race (e.g., internalized racism, collective racial self-esteem) influence dating preferences among Asian American communities. In addition to their research, teaching, and advocacy, they also maintain a clinical caseload as a licensed psychologist in private practice, in-person in Pennsylvania and virtually across all PsyPact states. As an editorial fellow at AAJP, he hopes to continue the journal's legacy of theoretical and methodological rigor, while also promoting scholarship related to underrepresented subgroups of the Asian American community.

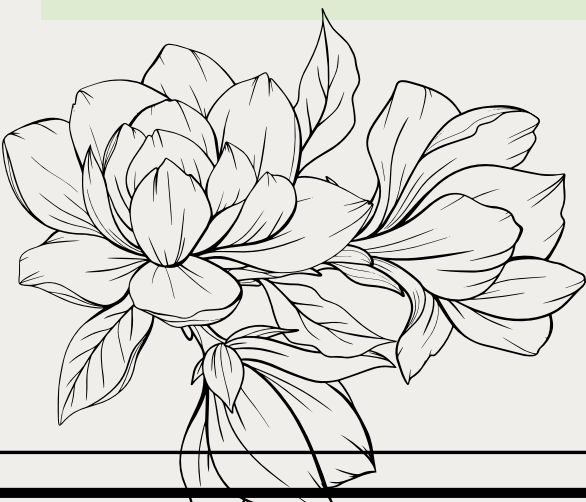


Dr. Vaishali Phatak

Dr. Vaishali Phatak is an associate professor at the

University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). She joined UNMC in 2017 after ten years at the University of Washington in Seattle, Washington. She completed her PhD at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and postdoctoral training at the Mayo Clinic. She is a board-certified neuropsychologist through the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP). As a clinician-scientist, she has served individuals with diverse cultural, socioeconomic, disability severity, and geographic backgrounds. Her research interests are in behavioral interventions in neurodegenerative disease. She sees an opportunity in recent advancements in technology to describe cognition on two levels: **specialization** as each person receives individualized care because every person is unique, and **abstraction**, as all people are treated equally because we are all the same.

As an AAJP Editorial fellow, she participates in manuscript review and receives mentorship in editorial leadership. Her goal for the fellowship is to understand the diversity of issues, particularly related to cognitive disorders in aging that impact Asian Americans, while maintaining high scientific rigor.



DMAA Event Updates



Collaboration Events with DMAA x DLGBTQQ

This spring, DMAA was invited to collaborate with the Division on LGBTQQ to host a members event discussing every nook and cranny of the show *Heated Rivalry*. It was an afternoon filled with levity and laughs, as well as critical reflections on queer identity and audiences, gender norms and expectations, and how Asian/mixed Asian identity and influences can (or could) be represented in popular media.

DMAA Awards Showcase

DMAA hosted our biannual Awards Presentation where we were able to highlight two of our past DMAA Research Award recipients. Each year, DMAA provides awards to support research and projects that address the unique experiences of multiracial and adopted Asian Americans. Two of our awardees from the previous awards cycle will be presenting on their projects this spring, and the remaining two awardees will present at our fall Research Award Presentations.

This spring, we are excited to showcase the work of two past awardees who will share findings from their research:

- Rebekah Chappell, PsyD Student, William James College
Adult Transracial Chinese Adoptee Utilization of Psychotherapy to Explore Racial, Cultural, and Adoptive Identity
- Sarah Kinane, PhD Candidate, Fordham University
Where Are You Really From?: Examining the Validity of the Multiracial Microaggressions Scale Among Half-East Asian, Half-White Individuals



AAPA Convention

Stay tuned for DMAA in Vegas (baby)! We plan on hosting a members event while all are gathered for the AAPA Convention this October 2026.



Clinical Consultation Event

We hosted our first DMAA Clinical Consultation Event! This free event was designed to provide a collaborative and supportive space for discussion, reflection, and consultation around clinical work. This event centered on clinical work with multiracial and/or adoptive individuals and was also intended as a space for clinicians and graduate students who identify as multiracial and/or adopted. Another clinical consultation event will be hosted in the fall.



Join Our Executive Committee!

We are excited to announce the openings of **elected** and **appointed** leadership positions. Serving in AAPA leadership is a way to strengthen our community, advance our mission, and amplify the voices of Asian American psychologists and allied professionals.



Current Executive Committee Openings

The next election cycle will **begin on October 12th and close on October 24th, 2026.**

Open Elected Positions for 2026 elections for the 2027-2028 term are:

President-Elect and Vice President-Elect (joint slate)
Secretary-Historian
Council of Division Representatives Chair
Board Member (Professional)
Board Member (Student)

Open Appointed Positions for 2026 elections for the 2027-2028 term are:

Communication Co-Officer
Membership Co-Officer
Finance Co-Officer
Education and Training Committee Co-Chair

If you are interested in serving on our executive committee or have further questions, please get in touch with our Secretary-Historian, Dr. Monique Shah Kulkarni: secretary@aapaonline.org

Suicide Ideation among Punjabis



Melody Mann



Manasa Swaminathan

Suicide has been identified as one of the leading causes of death in the United States; however, existing research has primarily been focused on dominant racial groups, with marginalized and immigrant communities being disproportionately underrepresented in psychology research (CDC, 2025). This discrepancy is especially true among Punjabi Americans, as almost no research has been conducted on this population despite South Asians (SAs) reporting some of the highest prevalence rates for common mental health disorders (Naveed et al., 2020). Punjabi Americans may experience unique forms of discrimination and cultural pressures, such as religious and racial profiling or intergenerational conflict, which can further shape mental health outcomes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that suicidal ideation and poor mental health outcomes within this community may be attributed to individual and systemic level barriers, including mental health stigma, acculturative stress, and lack of culturally appropriate care (Forte et al., 2018). There is an urgent need to not only raise mental health awareness but also develop culturally and contextually grounded resources for the Punjabi American community. While some community organizations have begun addressing this need, more comprehensive research must be conducted to better understand the impact of such inequities while developing feasible interventions. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to this meaningful discussion by exploring existing research and offering preliminary recommendations.

Punjabis & South Asians Across Mental Health

Globally, research around suicide ideation and self harm across Punjabi (and broader SA communities) is growing. Reviews and population studies from the United Kingdom consistently report elevated self-harm risk among young South Asian women compared to White peers, underscoring gendered, cultural, and family-honor dynamics that shape help-seeking and risk profiles (Hussain et al., 2006). However, within the United States, data is limited and not demographically representative of the unique experiences of immigrants and first generation individuals (Jordans et al., 2014; Khan & Waheed, 2006; Naz, 2016). In the U.S., research notes heterogeneity within SA subgroups, underutilization of formal services (from access, outreach, to referrals), and stigma as salient barriers (Srinivasa et al., 2022). However, across these reports, Punjabi and Sikh-specific analyses are sparse, limiting the field's ability to identify subgroup-specific risk factors and develop culturally responsive prevention and intervention strategies tailored to this population.

Landscape of Existing Resources

Mental health resources have begun to adapt their delivery to meet the needs of the diverse communities across the nation. The 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline offers 24/7 support with access to professional interpreters in 240+ languages (including Punjabi) via voice calling, which further expands linguistic accessibility for Punjabi speakers. However, these services are not always grounded in cultural and faith-based sensitivities for callers. Thus, grassroots nonprofit organizations have mobilized in response to the gaps in literature and service accommodations across the world. For example, Sikh Your Mind in Birmingham, UK is a nonprofit mental health organization dedicated to providing mental health helpline support to callers across Europe with culturally adapted and faith-sensitive care. Similarly, in the U.S., Sikh Family Center runs a helpline to support U.S. based Punjabi and SAs navigate mental health matters. Broadly, coming together in community efforts is a response Punjabis have to the lack of standardization in services, service delivery, and accessibility.

The American Association for Suicidology (AAS) provides contact information to helplines that are tailored towards varying identities for individuals contemplating suicide (AAS, 2025). However, the AAS does not have a structured guide on navigating suicidal thoughts or further normalizing seeking support for suicide ideations. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) documents numerous resources for recognizing suicide warning signs, seeking support, and healthy grieving strategies for those who lost a loved one to suicide (Grittmann, 2022). NAMI has a guide for practitioners and loved ones to navigate conversations on suicide (Norton, 2016), but it does not have a structured resource for individuals experiencing suicide ideation itself. The Suicide Prevention Resource Center mirrors NAMI greatly, by providing practitioners and regions guidelines for how to effectively promote suicide prevention through proactive, actionable steps that can be adopted and employed. However, this organization, though robust, does not address systemic level barriers and provide person-level indicators for the vulnerability, confusion, and urgency that an individual may experience when supporting someone with suicide ideation.

Acknowledging the Gap

At large, existing resources are tailored for bystanders of the individual experiencing suicidal tendencies, ideations, and planning, rather than acknowledging the antecedent of suicide contemplation — thoughts (Banyard et al., 2024). Resources tend to support those around the individual, rather than the individual undergoing the mental health struggle itself. Thoughts are a powerful indicator of an individual's intrinsic journey of their self concept, self identity, and emotional makeup. Through stigma, isolation, and the lack of resources around suicidal ideation, an individual may feel subject to societal labels that surface: “Weird”, “Get over it”, “Attention seeking”, “Weak minded”, “Sick”, etc. Further, cultural labels can arise based on one's geographic and cultural orientation. For instance, within the Punjabi and Sikh communities, suicidal ideation may be considered taboo and is often met with redirection towards spiritual practices/customs/scriptures, dismissal, or offense taken for “disrespecting” caregivers/surrounding support systems.

Recommended Practices

Given these disparities, future efforts should focus on addressing barriers and facilitators at both the individual and systemic levels. At the individual level, continued initiatives should prioritize understanding the lived experiences of Punjabi Americans as well as collaborating with local organizations to develop culturally and contextually grounded resources. For example, partnering with community-based organizations such as Jakara Movement, Sikh Coalition, SALDEF, Sikh Family Center, and South Asian Network (which work with Punjabi and broader South Asian communities across the United States) can help ensure that resources are culturally responsive and accessible. A first step in this work could be to adapt existing resources and develop safe spaces to normalize symptomatology and foster resilience and healing through communal dialog. Specifically, storytelling, artistic expression, and community connectivity should be leveraged in the development of such resources.

At a systemic level, clinician education and healthcare systems should promote decolonial ideologies and global approaches to care. This strategy moves beyond the mere amalgamation of diverse perspectives into Western frameworks and emphasizes the meaningful integration of non-Western ways of knowing and being to address suicidal ideation.

In an effort to further these conversations, a focus group was carried out with a small group of community partners to better understand the experiences of Punjabi Americans and develop a set of preliminary recommendations. This work is currently being translated into a manuscript for publication. Results from this focus group will also be convened through community talks, conference presentations, and educational initiatives.

For references, please click [here](#).

Explosive Emotions

by Andy Huỳnh

I tell my clients this is therapy:
Imagine you have all these explosives
you are burdened to carry.
People say they are *nasty* explosives
unlike fireworks and firecrackers.
They must never fire if not to burn
everyone. Since five years old, you were taught tricks
to hide these *nasty* explosives:
using other explosives like bang snaps and sparklers.

Sometimes we are carrying so many explosives
in our pockets, sleeves, and under our hats
that an inconspicuous spark,
like a mother's snicker or a friend's ambivalence, creates dynamite.

Everyone then asked *why did you light your explosives*,
flummoxed that you even had them on you as if you were not asked to hide
them since you were five years old.
Where was it expected to go?

What if I told you *I wanna see your explosions*,
an explosion within these four walls with just the two of us.

Once these explosives are lit in containment, there is relief.
Relief from not having to carry all these explosive emotions.
Emotions that came from somewhere.
Somewhere backwards in time.
Time in childhood.
Childhood.

My clients hear this and are bewildered.
Bewildered because *I want to get rid of these explosives!*
Explosives aren't meant to be used, they must be disarmed.
I thought the same too. I am scared of the explosive
napalms I saw when I was younger. It sticks
to your grandmother
to your mother
and to you, this explosive,
cursed to seep into your soul.

I tell you
It sounds like you are angry.

Because this is the anger I felt
and my mother felt
and my grandmother felt.
It is a rage
that is stronger than napalm.
It is a familiar rage that spans beyond
my memory.

That anger isn't too much.
And this disarmed you. Not the same disarmament
that your mother or brother asked from you, but the disarmament
of the protective sleeves that carry your explosives.
So some of the explosives
start dropping,
one by one
onto the floor like C4 and TNT.

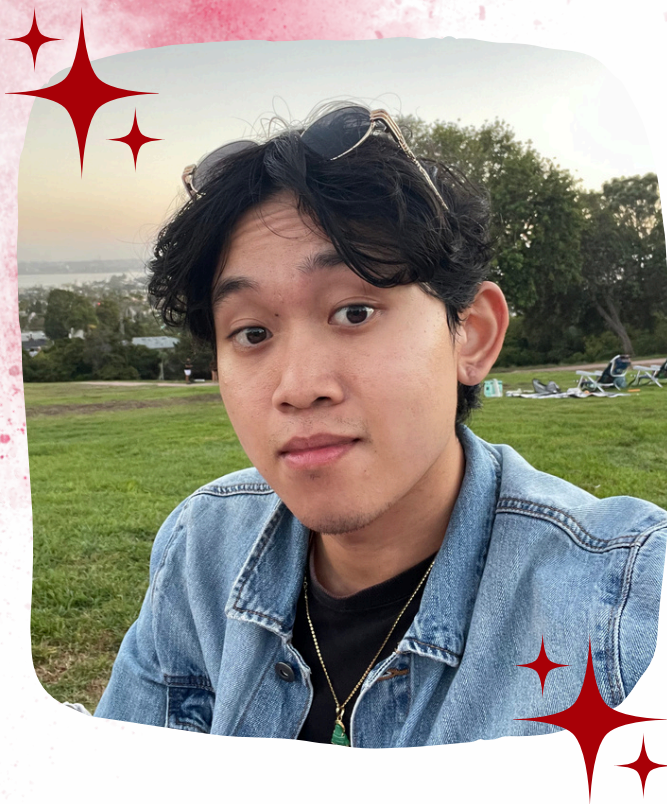
And even after that, there is still hesitancy to let these explosive emotions
explode.
What do I do now?

That's what we'll figure out together.
I will be your co-conspirator, harboring all these sacred explosives.
So, let's begin.



Andy Huỳnh

(he/him)



Andy recently graduated from San Diego State University's Community-Based Block (CBB) program. He earned his M.S. in Multicultural Community Counseling and Social Justice Education and plans to become a licensed counselor. He is proudly from City Heights, a diverse neighborhood in San Diego, blessed with immigrants and refugees from all across the globe, including Southeast Asia. He is honored to become a Vietnamese therapist working to advocate, empower, and heal communities like City Heights and fight against oppressive systems. He wants to work with first- and second-generation immigrants, especially Southeast Asians youth.

As a part of my master's capstone project, I decided to return to my love for writing as a medium to express my identities as a queer, second-generation Vietnamese-American man alongside my budding therapist identity interested in emotion-focused therapy, multicultural counseling, and person-centered therapy. I have selected one poem from my capstone, "Explosive Emotions", a poem that explains how I view the purpose of therapy and how it heals my community. Emotions are often not discussed in Asian families, and often suppressing emotions is how our families cope with trauma, poverty, and microaggressions. I have been told, growing up, to not express my anger and sadness in order to be small and invisible to survive. That was how my mẹ survived as an immigrant and believed that was how I would survive too. This poem is a calling to honor those "forbidden emotions" because grief, sadness, and anger are emotions familiar to my people. To heal from ancestral wounds requires acknowledging these emotions first. I hope to help others heal this way as a budding therapist.





“STUBBORN AND PASSIONATE ABOUT FIGHTING OPPRESSION”

INTERVIEW OF DR. DONNA DEMANARIG For AAPA’s Division on Women Digital HerStory Project

by Sue H. Kim PhD

Let’s start with a multiple-choice question to see how much you already know about Dr. Donna Demanarig, our current AAPA President.

When asked by Dr. Michi Fu what she would do if she were NOT a psychologist, Dr. Demanarig said:

1. Run an animal sanctuary
2. Be a veterinarian
3. Be a personal shopper
4. Be a house cleaner
5. All of the above

The answer will be revealed at the end of the article (or you can skip ahead and peek).

On April 10th, 2026, Dr. Michi Fu interviewed Dr. Donna Demanarig at her home in Rhode Island. The two shared cups of hot green tea originally gifted to Dr. Fu by Dr. Christine Iijima Hall, the first person to be interviewed for this DoW Digital HerStory project.

Dr. Demanarig is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor of Psychology at the College of the Holy Cross, but as an undergraduate at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, she “didn’t know there was psychology” as a major. Her parents, both immigrants from the Philippines, “wanted me to major in something practical...be a [medical] doctor!” When she took Intro to Psychology, she “fell in love with the class.” A self-described nerd, Dr. Demanarig then created a PowerPoint presentation to convince her parents that “a PhD is a REAL doctor.”

Dr. Demanarig recalled initially loving the large university setting. However, there were challenges in that it was “very white,” and she did not receive much guidance. As she took more psychology courses, she wondered, “Where are the Black and Brown folx in these textbooks?”

During her undergrad years, the clothing retailer Abercrombie & Fitch created t-shirts bearing anti-Asian racist tropes. Dr. Demanarig “was so angry...a bunch of us decided to go to the mall to protest in front of the store.” That anger propelled her, and she became one of the founders of a campus group called Asian Americans for Political Action, starting her lifelong activism journey.

Dr. Demanarig described herself as “stubborn” and “passionate,” but surprised herself by becoming tearful during the interview. “I’m not a crier,” she protested, wiping away tears after explaining what she wished someone had told her before she entered this field. “I had to navigate higher education on my own...[my parents] couldn’t really guide me.”



Dr. Michi Fu, on the left, wearing a black/white striped top and holding up a decorated mug in their left hand and the tea bag label in their right hand, sitting with Dr. Donna Demanarig, holding up a blue mug of tea, wearing a black/white striped top - both are smiling.

Mentors eventually emerged. Her doctoral advisor encouraged her to submit a proposal to the AAPA convention on her dissertation topic (a phenomenological study of Filipinx mail-order brides, “which is a pejorative term,” she clarified). When she arrived, she discovered that “it was nerve-racking for me...I was very intimidated.” She was a grad student in front of a room full of people, including many “prominent Filipinx psychologists.” As frightening as the experience was, she found a place and people who were supportive and encouraging.

After discovering AAPA, she connected with other mentors including Dr. Richelle Concepcion, Dr. Nellie Tran, Dr. Gloria Wong-Padoongpatt, Dr. Alvin Alvarez, Dr. Helen Hsu, Dr. Christine Catipon, and Dr. Michi Fu.

When asked what changes she hoped to make during her AAPA presidency, Dr. Demanarig acknowledged that AAPA members have already been doing important social justice work. She asked, “Am I going to get in trouble if I say this?” After a short hesitation, she let loose. “I will make good, necessary trouble. I want AAPA to endorse BDS [a movement advocating for boycotts of companies complicit with Israel’s occupation, apartheid, and genocide against Palestinians].” And she wants AAPA to “not rely so much on APA [American Psychological Association],” which “siphons the knowledge, energy, and skills of our community...taking and taking and not necessarily giving back.” Instead, Dr. Demanarig is committed to working “with our ethnic psychological association siblings.”



“You can be an activist, but you need to think about graduating. You can be an underground activist...do the work without putting your face out there because [your survival] is very important. [And] it doesn’t make you ‘less than’ as an activist.” - Dr. Demanarig

A priority for Dr. Demanarig is to “make sure [graduate students] in the EC [Executive Committee of AAPA] are protected...they’re our future!” She offered advice to them: “You can be an activist, but you need to think about graduating. You can be an underground activist...do the work without putting your face out there because [your survival] is very important. [And] it doesn’t make you ‘less than’ as an activist.” When we are working toward the goal of “liberation for all people, all marginalized people,” all the work counts. Dr. Demanarig is motivated by her work with students “because when I was in that position, I didn’t have anybody.”

Asked how she survives in these challenging times, Dr. Demanarig shared that it’s “always good to have your community...I get so much energy from being with my Quad, the [AAPA] Presidential Quad, and talking to folks like Michi [Fu] and Helen [Hsu].” Her partner, Daniel, is “super supportive.” She expressed that she is intentional about whom she lets into her life.

When Dr. Fu asked for “one lesson you hope the newer generation can learn from you,” Dr. Demanarig humbly said, “From me?”



Dr. Michi Fu on the left, smiling down at a black cat in their lap as Dr. Donna Demanarig looks on.

She paused and then said, “Be your own person. You don’t need to look up to someone like me, honestly. You know, you will find your way; you will pave your own path.” She sees herself as creating a little path to make part of the world a little better.

Finally, Dr. Demanarig summed up why she does what she does. A bit tearful, she said, “I know I only have a short time in this world, right? Like all of us do. And I want to make sure I leave something so that future generations can thrive and have a much better existence...[rather] than just constantly fighting the system.”

Although she declared that she is “not a role model,” Dr. Demanarig most definitely is. And while she is a world-class psychologist and “badass,” she could also picture herself in an alternate universe rescuing and nursing hurt and abandoned animals back to health, helping someone shop for special clothing, and getting a house sparkly clean. (Answer: 5 – All of the Above).

3rd Convention of Asian Pacific American Feminist Psychology

Connection and Care on the Coast (of California)

Martha Merchant, PsyD

"Look, there's one! Right there, on top of that rock!"

We burst into laughter. We were standing on a sidewalk looking down over the railing at the shoreline, which was covered in rocks, trying to see crabs.

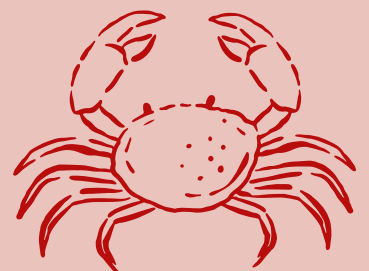
There were about 9 of us participating in the final concurrent session titled Coastal Nature Wander and Wonder Experience at the 3rd Convention of Asian Pacific American Feminist Psychology in San Diego, California. Even though we were wandering along the backside of the hotel, this strip of shore was full of life. It just took us some time to get the hang of seeing the life that was crawling around below us. I was amazed, not for the first time, at how nature continues to flourish despite man-made structures, pollutants in the water, and in some cases, possibly far from its natural home.

Not every conference is alike, y'all. I go to a lot of conferences, some focused on mental health, some for education, some specifically around trauma. I generally expect going to these events that I will be in community with like-minded folk, but the truth is, that hasn't always been true. This past weekend, though, was different. The theme this year was Rooted in Connection, Rising in Care—Feminist Visions of Liberation and Well-Being, and from the moment I arrived, I felt connection and genuine care. I arrived on Friday so missed out on the first speaker on Thursday evening (Ramani Durvasula, PhD) and Friday's opening program (which included a performance from the Karen Organization of San Diego). I heard about how wonderful those events were multiple times over the weekend.

“

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”



3rd Convention of Asian Pacific American Feminist Psychology

Connection and Care on the Coast (of California)



Image shows the hosts of the walk, Sophia Shi, Jessica Strom and Ngoc Tran, heads close together. Visible behind them is a hotel, a tiny bit of the marina, a parking lot and lots of palm trees.



Image shows viney green plants I saw on the walk.

This area drew my attention because of that round, red fruit in the center. The green vines go right up to the edge of the water, and visible in the water are the reflections of the tops of boats.

I didn't know the folks at the registration desk, but they greeted me with such warmth I felt my travel stress decrease right away. I was encouraged to join the mentoring event that was underway and right away found myself at a table of people talking candidly about their experiences and ideas for moving forward. We were imagining liberation collectively as it related to our individual settings. It was a conversation full of both reality and hope.

Unsurprisingly, the featured speakers (Linda Thai, LMSW, Zahabiyah Yamasaki, MEd, and Karen Suyemoto, PhD) were each powerful and nourishing in their own ways. The other sessions, though, were (unlike some conferences) equally powerful. I had a hard time selecting which ones to attend because every time slot had multiple interesting offerings.

On Sunday I chose the nature walk with Jessica Strom, Sophia Shi and Ngoc Tran, not because the other topics didn't appeal to me, but because I'd been inside all weekend and would be flying out that night. I really wanted to have the opportunity to get out in nature, and I'm so glad I did. Not only did I get to spend time in wonder with nature, but also we got to commune with each other, laughing and sharing stories about our connection to land and ancestors. It nurtured my soul and I felt very much in a like-minded community.

MEMBERSHIP SPOTLIGHT

*J. Abigail
Saavedra*



Membership Level

Professional

Affiliation

Department of Psychology, at California State University, Northridge.

(Previously at University of Nevada, Las Vegas)

Social Media

 @saavedra.phd on Instagram

What is your cultural background and identities?

Second-generation Filipina American

Which Divisions are you a member of?

Division on Filipino Americans

How did you come to find and become involved with AAPA?

I was first introduced to AAPA by one of my first Asian American psychologist mentors, Dr. Lauren Berger. I then became more involved in AAPA over time through the AAPA's Graduate Leadership Institute program.

Please share a fond or meaningful memory of your experience in AAPA.

Connecting with multiple generations of AAPA leaders—including emerging leaders in my “generation”—through the 2019 Graduate Leadership Institute was a pivotal moment in my professional development as an Asian American psychologist. My sense of purpose and resolve to pursue my ideas about Asian Americans’ critical consciousness development were strengthened by the leadership development, mentorship, and affirming relationships fostered through the GLI. I’m still mentored by several of the organization leaders I met that year, and I still maintain close friendships with others I’ve met through that program!

How have you changed from the beginning of your career to now?

I started my graduate school journey with broad research interests in Asian American and Filipinx culture, ethnic identity, multiculturalism, and culturally-affirming approaches to mental healthcare. All of those research topics remain vital for us scholars to consider! Now, as an incoming Assistant Professor, I’ve grown much more in my *Asian American* critical consciousness, and I more explicitly address how this politicized racial identity is a core influence on Asian American psychology (and on my sense of purpose as an Asian American developmental scientist). In other words, my work and aspirations as a scholar have gotten much more political and much more specific in regard to which aspects of the Asian American experience I want to speak on.

As the focus of my work shifted, so did my confidence in my voice and my resolve to contribute. Over the years, I’ve become more critical about what psychology could (and should) do to center social justice in training, research, and practice; and I’ve become more certain about what I as a researcher wanted to model and convey in my work on Asian American critical consciousness and social justice-oriented approaches to education. I attribute much of this internal shift to the wisdom of my mentors—both fellow graduate students and scholars further into their careers—and the courage of community members I’ve learned from in the past ten years.

How have you changed from the beginning of your career to now? (continued)

Now, in all projects I take on—including those that revolve around questions of culture, ethnic-racial identity, and mental health—I ground my work in the social, political, and transnational history of Asian American racial formation. I consider questions like, “What are the psychological ramifications of Asian Americans’ racial positioning as ‘model minorities’ in a white supremacist, anti-Black, imperialist U.S. society?” “How do cultural beliefs intermix with Asian Americans’ racial positioning to shape Asian American parenting and anti-racist activism?” and “As Asian Americans, what roles and responsibilities do we have to destabilize oppressive social norms—through Ethnic Studies education, anti-racist and anti-capitalist parenting, culturally-responsive mentoring, community activism, etc.—and to build more equitable social institutions?”

What advice do you have for someone new in the field?

Find mentors across career stages, including other graduate students. You can do this through signing up for mentorship programs in professional organizations (like the AAPA’s GLI), introducing yourself to others at conferences (especially through student divisions or emerging scholar events), or even emailing a scholar whose work you find interesting! Reaching out to potential mentors or collaborators may feel unnatural in some ways (I still find it awkward to email a stranger and ask them for a favor), but I highly encourage you to engage in informational interviewing and networking on a quarterly/semesterly basis.

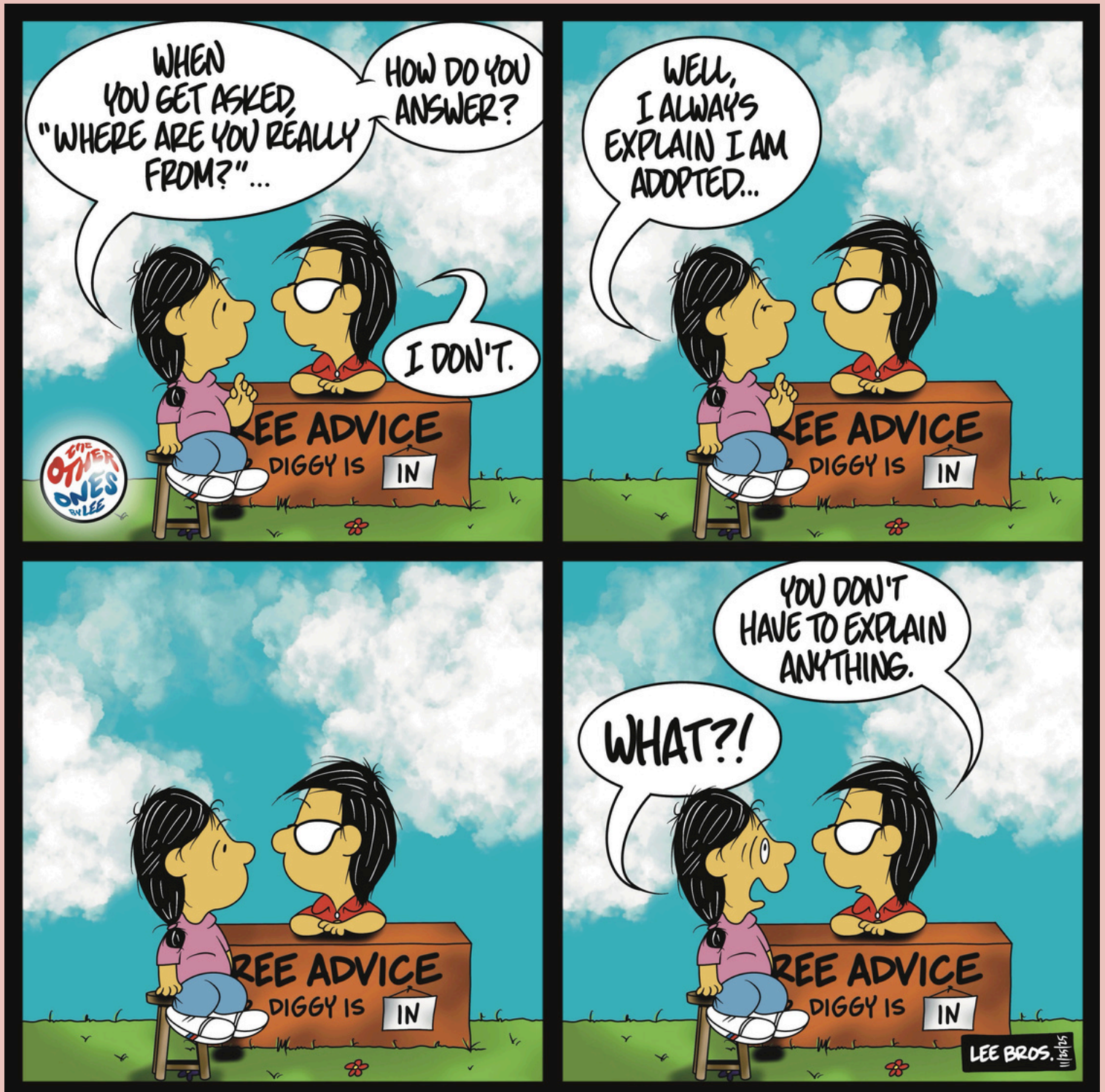
Some of my “cold emails” and random visits to conference poster presentations have blossomed into friendships and collaborations that affirmed my sense of purpose, enriched my ideas, provided intel for how to survive graduate school, and expanded my professional network.

What are some of your hopes for the future?

In terms of my career, my biggest hope is to help build our field's base of daring, critical, social justice-oriented scholars. It would be an immense honor and responsibility to empower the next generation of Asian American psychologists to critically analyze power and start envisioning how psychology can be applied towards the liberation of Asian Americans and other oppressed communities. Once I get my bearings as a new professor at CSU Northridge, I look forward to mentoring undergraduate and Master's students interested in developmental psychology research – specifically, research on ethnic-racial socialization (the process by which people learn about what it means to be part of their ethnic-racial group from parents, schools, etc.) and critical consciousness development (the process by which people learn to understand, analyze, and resist oppression) among Asian Americans. (Side note: I will be taking on Master's students in the 2027-2028 school year!)

THE OTHER ONES

BY LEE



"WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?"

The comic features Young Hee, an adopted Korean American raised by White parents, and Diggy, a 2nd gen Korean American raised by immigrant Korean parents. They discuss whether or not it is necessary to answer the question Asian Americans often are asked - Where are you really from? For Young Hee, she explains that she is adopted. But for Diggy, he pushes back on the idea that it's even necessary to respond.

The comic highlights many issues faced by Asian Americans, both adopted and not. It addresses the issue of xenophobia and the forever foreigner stereotype and the option for Asian Americans to simply resist. Racial socialization is not just something taught by parents but also transmitted through peer interactions.

Rich and Martin Lee
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities

The Other Ones by Lee comic is co-created by brothers Martin and Richard Lee. Martin is the artist who creates the characters and scenes. Richard writes the text, drawing upon his expertise in Psychology and Asian American Studies. Richard is a Past President of AAPA and has been an AAPA member since the early 1990s. Richard is a Distinguished McKnight University Professor in Psychology and Asian American Studies at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. Martin is an artist based in Pensacola, Florida who is a freelance graphic and logo designer as well as an avid disc golfer.

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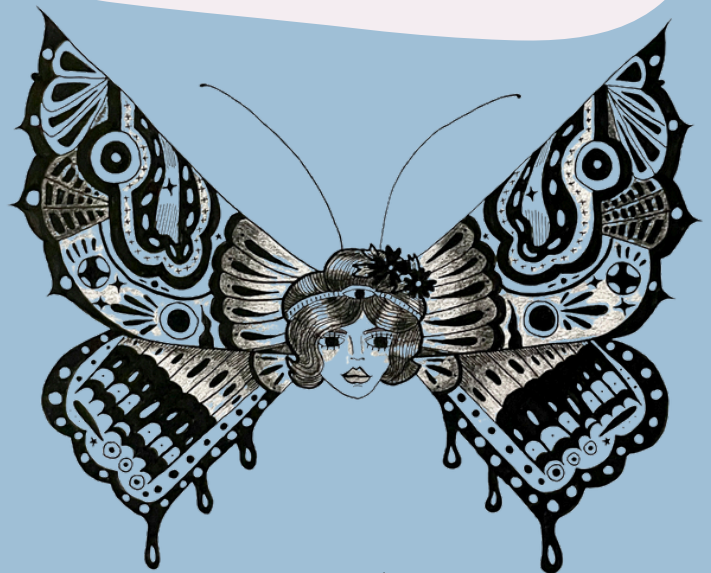
geng@ucsb.edu

she/her



Butterfly #2

"Last summer, I felt a sudden and powerful urge to draw butterflies. I ended up creating a series of black-and-gray butterfly illustrations using Micron pens and colored pencils, which culminated in a poem about the strength of the feminine (seen on the next page). Butterflies have long been associated with femininity, rebirth, transformation, and resilience, and this piece is one butterfly from that larger series."



Butterfly #1



Butterfly #4



Butterfly #3

"This year, I learned that butterflies are also being embraced as a symbol of immigrants, representing the idea that migration is natural, beautiful, and part of life. That meaning resonated deeply with me. Looking back, I now see my instinct to draw these butterflies as almost a kind of foreshadowing, as my research has since shifted toward supporting immigrant students amid increasingly intense immigration enforcement climates."

OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE LIGHT
AND LOVE ALWAYS SURRENDER TO
THE AWAKENING WITHIN SOFTEN
INTO THE UNWAVERING STRENGTH
OF THE DIVINE FEMININE LET IT
HOLD YOUR OPEN HEART WITH
GRACE AND SWALLOW IT WHOLE
LIFE AND DEATH OR REBIRTH OF
THE SOUL TAP INTO YOUR OWN
SPIRIT AND INTUITION TO FINALLY
SEE THE QUIET BUTTERFLY IN
ALL OF ITS MIGHT OM SHANTI
OM DUM DURGAYE I NAMAH
OPEN YOUR EYES TO THE LIGHT



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Research on the Impact of Anti-Palestinian Racism



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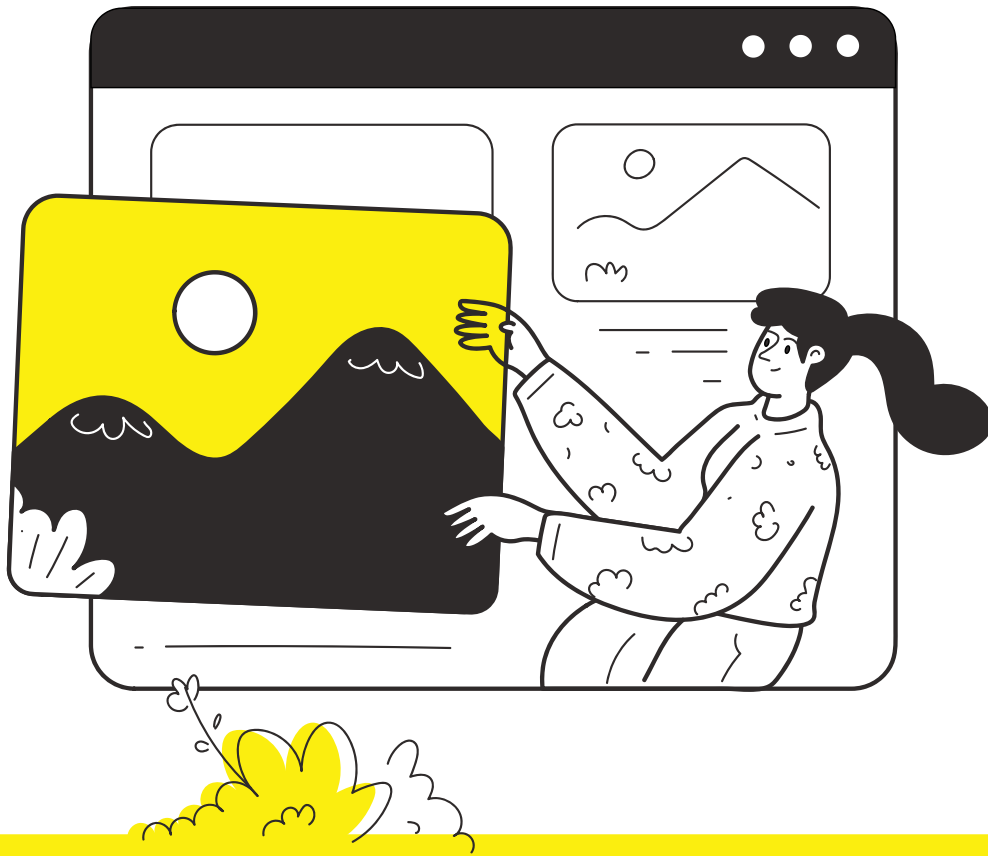
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