

Home Asian Americans



Diwali Festival in San Antonio by Ruben Garcia Photography <https://www.flickr.com/people/68489662@N05> Via Wikipedia Creative Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:United_States_Diwali_Dance_San_Antonio_2011_b.jpg

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By Shruti Rajkumar, AsAmNews Intern

Marriage and family therapist Ulash Dunlap has always considered herself a part of the Asian community, especially having grown up in the United Kingdom where there was a large South Asian community. But when she came to the United States, she was surprised to find out that some people didn't perceive her that way.

“When you're born and raised in a country where everyone's told you [that] you're Asian, and then you come to a country, and even Asian people are telling you 'No, you're not Asian'...it was really hard for me in



The **Census Bureau** defines an Asian person as “having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.” Despite this, Indian Americans as well as other South Asian Americans are often disconnected from the Asian American community and identity.

According to a 2016 National Asian American **Survey**, 42% of White people reported that Indians are not likely to be Asian, while most White people reported that Chinese, Korean, and Japanese people are Asian or Asian American. In addition, 15% of Asian Americans believed Indians are “not likely to be” Asian or Asian American.

Karthick Ramakrishnan



Director of AAPI Data Karthick Ramakrishnan said that the image of who counts as Asian is predominately East Asian due to historical patterns, as well as the biases and representations that flow out of them. Early waves of migration in the United States were predominantly Chinese and Japanese. These communities constituted the vast majority of Asian Americans until the 1960s, which only began to shift in the 1970s due to the Southeast Asian refugee crisis, said Ramakrishnan.

“Populations that tend to be around longer tend to be more likely to be represented in the media [and] in political office. But it is important for us to update our understanding. Indians are now the largest Asian American group in this country. But we are far from the day when Indian Americans are considered fully Asian American, the way that East Asians are considered Asian American,” Ramakrishnan said.

Dunlap said that the perception of Indian and South Asian Americans as Asian, as well as how they identify themselves, is really complex. She said it isn’t true that all East Asians perceive them as non-Asian. In fact, some Indian and South Asians don’t identify themselves as a part of the Asian American community.

Clinical psychologist Dr. Helen Hsu said that although she considers Indian and South Asian Americans as part of the Asian American community, she knows that not everyone feels the same way. She notes that while there has been a lot of Asian American solidarity and activism happening, some Asian Americans prefer to identify within

^ Can self-identify? If they do not see themselves as Asian American, I'm not gonna be like, 'Oh, yes, you are.' When they want to be included in the API umbrella, I am happy to have them and I welcome them. But for those who don't feel like that describes them, I feel like we have to go with how people self-identify," said Hsu.

The perception that Indian and South Asian Americans aren't Asian is perpetuated by the strong focus on East Asians in articles, research, and literature, said Dunlap. Ramakrishnan said that with the anti-Asian hate that's been happening over the past year, the media has fixated on what's been happening to East Asians and not as much with South Asians.

"For example, with the killings of four Sikh individuals in that FedEx facility, it registered some level of attention for a couple of days, and then it just went away. And more generally, not just South Asians, but Sikhs in particular, who've been targeted and killed in the dozens since 9-11, there has not been much in the way of sustained attention or concern in the larger Asian American community," Ramakrishnan said.

Ramakrishnan notes the importance of opportunities for South Asian voices in order to give as much equity as possible to different communities within the Asian American umbrella. Today, there is more Indian and South Asian Americans representation within politics and news media, such as Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the United States Juanita Cooke, Vice President Kamala Harris, and PBS broadcast journalist Hari Sreenivasan.

"But that's not the only thing that matters. In people's minds, it's not just to know that those individuals exist, but do you consider them to be Asian? That's still gonna take a while. South Asians are the fastest



*Photo from Asian American Psychological Association, Division of South Asian Americans.
Courtesy Ulash Dunlap*

Last year, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Asian American Psychological Association collaborated with the American Psychological Association to create a series of public service announcements consisting of videos to help AAPI families talk to their kids about COVID-19 related bullying and harassment. Dunlap said the videos included herself as well as Chinese American and a Japanese American talking about these issues, which shows representation and collaboration within the Asian American community.



Hsu said that within the Asian American community, the nuances and needs of specific communities deserve different kinds of attention. However, she said that the pros of Asian Americans being more aligned with one another and being more inclusive is that there is a bigger impact.

“We have some issues that do overlap enough, but I feel we are often in alignment about what our community’s needs are, and then we’re able to have way more impact when we are in coalition. And yet, I think it’s absolutely crucial that things like the data be disaggregated, because we just lose the nuances of what each community really needs,” Hsu said.

Dunlap said that it’s important that we break the perceptions of who we define as Asian so that we can form allyships. Additionally, she said we need to empower our own racial and ethnic identity.

“If [I haven’t] worked on [my] own identity, I could actually end up doing more harm, because I don’t understand what my Chinese American brothers and sisters need [and what] my Cambodian American brothers and sisters need. If I’ve made a connection to [someone] who identifies as Cambodian American, and I’m not excluding [them] from the conversation, we’ve created inclusion together. We can start really small first, learning to understand each other,” Dunlap said.

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