

Hate: A Side Effect of Covid-19

By Elena Acoba

From the early days of COVID-19, I had more than my health to worry about.

I'm writing a journal about this historic time...to record the minutiae of everyday life. I did not expect that it would become a record of my stress over Asian American hate.

I'm a Filipino American. Unfortunately, I'm used to regular harassment and microaggressions. Now I felt threatened. Kung flu. China virus. I instantly knew this rhetoric would make life tough for people like me. And I wasn't the only one who knew. At a grocery store, I struck up a conversation with a Korean American. This stranger summed up what we faced: With COVID, we are all Chinese. My journal is full of instances that this is true.

I saw strangers pull up, hesitate, turn around or give me a wide berth when they saw me. I started thinking they were afraid of me because of my Asian-looking face. I was pissed off that racism made me wonder if people were avoiding me! Sometimes I found myself doing the same thing...in a way.

I had to pass by a big, beefy white guy and a big, beefy white teenager. I averted my eyes and hoped they would pass me by and leave me alone. Then I felt guilty that I was following a stereotype and being racist. Then I was mad that I feel this way. My daughter is proudly multicultural. She physically doesn't look Asian. I sadly felt grateful for that.

I told her not to publicly mention her Asian American background right now. I feel that will help her avoid any racist confrontations and keep her safe. I do not like that I felt the need for this conversation. But to me, I had no choice. Terrible news kept scaring me.

There has been a bit of news about Asian American elderly getting attacked. It made me want to just stay home. Who needs all that stress? The shootings of Asian American women in Atlanta finally broke me. I cried.

I hate this idea that I'm scared even though it's unlikely I would be harassed or attacked. I'm a little concerned about my mental health over this. Eventually, two Zoom meetings were held for the local Asian American community. At least one official expressed empathy.

Tucson City Councilman Steve Kozachik assured us that how AAPI folks are feeling is valid, even if the initial perception of events may be wrong. The Tucson mayor and law enforcement officers also attended. Otherwise, crickets...from other officials, the media and the rest of the community. I felt Tucson did not care.

I was part of the Asian American pride movement in the 1970s. I wonder where we went wrong. Well into the 21st century people are still surprised that Asian American hate exists. I've resolved to again speak up at every...single...instance of AAPI harassment and hate.

I also must do better to find allies so that together we can open people's eyes.

The Age of COVID revealed to me that this work is far from done.