



## Celebrating our diverse 'Asian American' colleagues

Voices from Prudential's Asian Pacific Islander American community on what it means to be Asian in America

By Kara Corridan

The multitude of backgrounds and experiences in the Asian American Pacific Islander community sometimes gets lost in the term "Asian American." In fact, Nicole DeGrave's husband wasn't sure she really belonged in a video about Asian American colleagues at Prudential.

"I said, 'What do you mean? I'm an Asian Pacific Islander. That's Asian,'" shares the account manager, Premier Account Management, Group Insurance, in the video above. "He was like, 'Well, I don't know about that.'"

DeGrave is used to the skepticism. Growing up in Chicago with a mother of Hawaiian descent who was born in Germany, she "knew no Asians," she says. "My entire life, people speculated what race or ethnicity I am. Most people can never pinpoint it."

It wasn't until DeGrave was 18, visiting family in Hawaii, that she felt like she belonged. "It was the first time I was surrounded by others who looked like me. It was such an emotional moment."

Her story reflects the reality of many Asian Americans: There is no singular "Asian American experience."

This group consists of 22 million people from more than 20 countries in East and Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent, according to Pew Research Center. And as recent findings from the organization revealed, "Asian" as a label simply doesn't fit most people's perception of themselves. Or it's just one of many ways they identify themselves.

This is certainly the case for DeGrave and four other Asian American employees, all members of the [APA business resource group](#) for Asian Pacific Islander Americans and their allies. To celebrate Asian American Pacific Islander Heritage Month, each of them share deeply personal insights — as well as ways others can broaden their perspective of what it means to be Asian in America.

**The idea of Indian women as passive and quiet is wrong.**

“One stereotype typically associated with a lot of Indian women, especially in this country, is that we tend not to speak up. So when I am forthright with my comments, sometimes I almost get a reaction of shock.”

– Uttara Patla, vice president, Prudential Communications

**Trying to fit in to American culture can come at a cost.**

“I was born in the United States, and facing some of the prejudice that came with being Asian American, I may have swung too far the other way to try and do everything I could to identify myself as American.”

– Robert Cho, executive director, PGIM Real Estate

**Sharing our stories goes a long way.**

“When I say I’m from Iran, I’m dealt with this awkward silence. So I try to proactively share a couple of tidbits of my story and be curious about theirs, because I truly believe everyone has a story. It makes us more connected to each other.”

– Sara Taheri, vice president and chief product owner, Enabling Solutions

**Being curious about other cultures should be a yearlong endeavor.**

“It’s not enough to do it during the respective heritage month. Just like anything else, it’s a muscle we need to train and develop, and something we need to practice every day.”

– James Chae, vice president, PGIM Fixed Income