

Krista Suh inventor of the pussyhat, is all about pink



Photo by Rachel Lee Stroud

Krista Suh, the inventor of the pink hat.

By Kai Curry
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

The day after President Trump's inauguration, on Jan. 21, 2017, the largest single-day protest in U.S. history took place in Washington, D.C. It was the first Women's March. On that day, over 450,000 people marched, while an estimated 3 to 5 million men and women participated in other cities across the United States. Many of us are familiar with

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APA voices in feminism

NEW EXHIBIT AT THE WING LUKE



Photo courtesy of Maria Batayola

Asian Pacific Womens Caucus at CID Festival 1979

By Carolyn Bick
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

As a Filipino woman of mixed heritage who immigrated to the United States with her family when she was 14 years old, Maria Batayola knows what it's like to simultaneously feel the need for feminism and be shut out and alienated by it.

Batayola was a student at the University of Washington, during the Vietnam War era, and remembers that veterans and enlisted men would hit on her, first in Vietnamese, expecting her to understand it, and then in Tagalog, the native language of the Philippines, once they learned she was Filipina. She learned to navigate these interactions, but she always did it in a way that would preserve what she calls her "likeability

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Gov. Inslee issues emergency proclamation limiting large events



Photo from the governor's office

Gov. Jay Inslee (center) at a COVID-19 press conference on March 11 with County Executive Dow Constantine (left) an ASL interpreter, and Mayor Jenny Durkan (right)

Gov. Jay Inslee announced on March 11 new community strategies and social distancing plans to minimize COVID-19 exposure, particularly in counties hit hardest by the virus.

Events that take place in King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties with more than 250 people are now prohibited by the state. This applies to gatherings for social, spiritual, and recreational activities. These include but are not limited to: community, civic, public, leisure, faith-based, or sporting events; parades; concerts; festivals; conventions; fundraisers and similar activities.

"We recognize this new limitation will impact thousands of people, their plans, and their investments in these events," Inslee said. "However, this is one of the most prudent

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WA researcher helps discover protein that could stop COVID-19

Researchers at University of Texas Southwestern (UTSW) Medical Center, including a Washington native, have discovered a genetic protein in the human immune system that impairs the coronavirus' ability to initiate infection, which could lead to treatments for COVID-19.

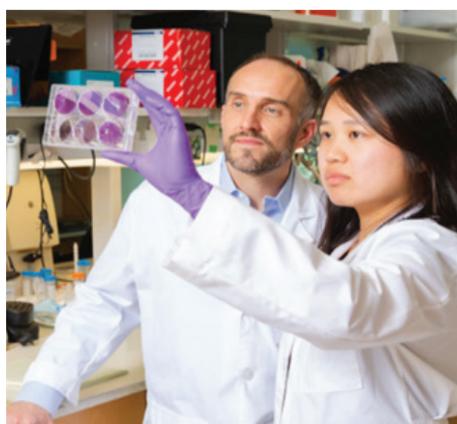
Dr. Katrina Mar of Olympia and graduate of Western Washington University, is a postdoctoral researcher in the Schoggins lab at UTSW and co-lead author of the study. She, along with Dr. John Schoggins, associate professor of microbiology at UTSW, partnered with scientists in Switzerland and New York.

The research team looked at the

impact of the LY6E protein on severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus (SARS-CoV), Middle East respiratory (MERS) coronavirus, and COVID-19. In all three cases, the LY6E genetic protein inhibited the viruses' ability to initiate infection.

"Because LY6E is a naturally occurring protein in humans, we hope this knowledge may help in the development of therapies that might one day be used to treat coronavirus infections," Schoggins said. Like many scientific discoveries, this one was a by-product of another study.

The study is still awaiting peer review. Researchers concluded that therapies mimicking the LY6E pro-



Courtesy UT Southwestern

UT Southwestern's Dr. Katrina Mar and Dr. John Schoggins used a mouse model for the coronavirus research.

tein could provide a key defense against coronavirus. Similar antiviral fusion inhibitors have been successfully used for HIV-1. ■

Sanders, Biden virtually tied in Washington

By Staff
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

Washington's presidential primary is too close to call, and because all votes there are cast by mail or by dropping them off in a ballot box, many ballots were marked for candidates who have since dropped out of the race.

Initial returns from Washington state show Sen. Bernie Sanders and former Vice President Joe Biden are both polling at just over 32% in Washington state. Sanders has a slight 0.25% lead over Biden.

Because voters' ballots only had to be postmarked by March 10 or dropped at an election box by 8 p.m. on March 10, final results could take days or weeks to calculate. ■

PINK LADY from 1

that first march and with the iconic “pink hats” the protestors wore.

The Saturday after Trump’s election, Krista Suh, Asian American screenwriter, activist, and artist, was sitting in her parents’ car on the way to a camping trip to celebrate her parents’ anniversary. Suh, like many people, was agitated by the results of the election.

“People were really thrown by it,” she remembered. “I like to tell people that it was so bad that my therapist called to cancel on me the next day.” Suh, living then and now in Los Angeles, wanted to do something. But what?

News of the Women’s March was already bubbling up, and Suh planned to attend. But, “I felt there had to be something I could do beyond showing up.” Suh had lived in New York for college, so she knew it would be cold. How about a hat?

“That felt like it had meaning because I was making it with my own hands. I’m a beginner, simplistic knitter. . . If I can make this hat, anyone could. That’s when it went from one to many. If we all made them, and we all sent them in, it would create a sea of pink. That’s when I knew I was on to something.”

Suh was indeed on to something. The idea of the hat took off. People around the country started making them, not just Suh and her circle. Before she knew it, “ownership” of the hat was pretty much out of her hands to the point where, now, almost no one knows who thought of it. Suh is OK with that. To her, the message of the hat is greater than herself. That first year, Suh recalled, “When I went to D.C., I would see women wear the hats around town, and it was such a uniting experience. I didn’t know them, but all of the sudden, I felt like I did. It felt like a special secret, too, because they had no idea that I was the creator of it all. . . A couple of friends insisted that I had to take a moment to take it all in. They brought me over to this guardrail. I’m only five feet tall, and I could see, all the way down the (National) Mall, the sea of pink was really stunning.”

In honor of International Women’s Day, the Northwest Asian Weekly wanted to bring Suh’s story to the forefront. Born in New Jersey, Suh has lived in Los Angeles since she was about 4 years old. Her last name comes from her father, who is from Korea, while her mother was born in Taiwan, yet her family came from Hunan, China. Growing up, Suh’s was her grandmother’s favorite—with a catch. “Grandmother was a very strong woman from Korea. She was a doctor. She went to med school in Korea and practiced there at a time when female doctors were very rare, and yet, there is a bias in Asian culture toward men.”

“It’s too bad you weren’t born a boy,” Suh’s grandmother would say to her. “She was saying I am the right temperament and the right person—but I’m not a boy.”

Given this background, and in spite of Suh’s grandmother’s having chosen an unconventional career, the response from Suh’s parents when she announced she would like to be a screenwriter was less than positive.

“My parents are really awesome, but at the same time, in Asian culture, especially Asian American culture, there’s this deep-seated fear that if you veer off the ‘correct’ path, you’ll be a loser, a failure, a slacker, a hippie. . .”

“I think that type of pressure that Asian Americans put on themselves and their children is very debilitating. At the least, it’s quite restricting. We don’t get to allow ourselves to do really cool things that make history. It was a battle for me to become a screenwriter, not just with the typical obstacles, but also to deal with the family pressure and disappointment.”

Fast forward to the first Women’s March and Suh views her challenges growing up and choosing her path as a training ground

Most people are unaware that the creator of the hat is AAPI

that aligned her closely with her views on feminism.

“Activism often is about standing up to those in power because your beliefs differ. For me, the first time I had to use that skill, I really learned it when I had to ideologically fight people who loved me, like my parents. Because I’ve done those trials by fire, going against Trump—it’s pretty easy.”

So, what is it like wearing the pink hat? Suh acknowledges that it makes a person stand out, and at the same time, gives that person the security of being part of a collective whole.

“It does help to see the hat on other people, to feel safer, because I do think it is a statement of ‘you are not alone.’” Suh told the Weekly about her trip home from the first march in D.C.

“I was seated in the corner window seat and, of course, the guy next to me was in full Trump regalia. . . He had his red hat on, and I had my pink hat on. I felt the threat level go up. I went to the bathroom, and some ladies waiting in line for the bathroom were like, ‘We’ve been keeping an eye on you. We’ve been looking out for you.’”

Which brings up the question—does the pink hat unite? Some say the Women’s March, and the hat, have been “kidnapped” by white women. The fact that most people are unaware that the creator of the hat is AAPI seems to corroborate this. Suh counters that giving in to this type of thinking only serves to strengthen the paradigms of a patriarchal society—that we should fight about who “owns” the hat, or the march, rather than recognizing that anyone can march and anyone can represent women, together or alone.

“I don’t think that there’s one right way of doing something, and to do it any other way you’re doing it wrong. . . It’s a strange standard to women’s issues that we have to be perfectly united, otherwise we’re not worth hearing out. Once two women don’t get along, it’s a big deal, like a cat fight, whereas two white men might argue and they’re both respected afterwards. . . It’s not a binary thing. . . There’s a meta level where the questions themselves are sort of boxing in feminism.” This does not mean that Suh does not recognize the discrimination towards AAPI females that still needs to be addressed. Yet, “I try to come at it from a way where we’re building something together versus tearing things apart.”

The color pink, too, Suh does not have a problem with. Some within the women’s movement have suggested the need to create distance from symbols historically tied to women. It’s not a new idea. Suh reminded us about a time when women went the opposite direction and chose blue. All we are doing, she claimed, is again, giving into the stereotypes of others.

“I don’t think it’s about the color,” she explained. “It’s about our deep-seated fear of femininity.” Claims that pink is “too girly” or “too undignified” upset Suh. “They’re really missing the point here. It makes me sad and frustrated that somehow we associate whatever is the male association to be more dignified, to be taken more seriously. [Such as] if I wear blue, I’ll be taken more seriously. If I watch sports, I’ll be considered more cool. If I don’t spend as much money on beauty products, I’ll be more respected.” Suh’s webpage is themed in pink. And a book she wrote, *DIY Rules for a WTF World*, discusses how women can break away from restricting ideas of femininity and claim their power and their



inner creativity.

“It was important for me to go hard with pink and not veer away with that,” she insisted.

At the same time, Suh said, do whatever you like with the pink hat, also called “the pussyhat.” It’s yours. It’s ours. It’s hers. It’s Asian American. It’s white. It’s LGBTQ. It’s whatever women want it to be. Suh determined “to have a light hand on the pussyhat.” To let it become part of the movement and the march.

“If people wanted to make their own color hat, of course, go for it. The reason why it’s pink is to be more powerful and united, to create that sea of pink together. Individually, it stands out. . . but collectively, it can be different shades of pink, it can be an amazing, startling statement together. There are no rules.”

Suh is radical in reclaiming pink. In saying, femininity does not equate to weakness. She is radical in letting herself be absorbed by the women’s movement, while at the same time, still participating in the movement.

“On one hand, I want the whole world

to know it was me,” she admitted. “But on the other hand, it almost doesn’t matter. So many people created it together. Millions of women made this hat. . . I really want to focus and acknowledge how it was made by many people, but at the same time, I’m also aware of how there is a tendency for women not to brag about themselves.” That’s when Suh says that she would like to be an inspiration, “for girls of color, for little Asian girls like me, who were told they had to be a doctor lest they shame the entire family. It happened so quickly. . . It continues on. . .”

Suh has plenty to say, and as an activist, artist, and screenwriter, she is adding her voice to all of our voices, no matter our background, to fight against common difficulties as women and as citizens. She hasn’t forgotten that the Women’s March happens every year, and that we still have a long way to go. ■

More can be found out about Krista Suh at kristasuh.com.

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