

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Denise Sekaquaptewa

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Ann Arbor, MI
November 17, 2017*

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AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

DS: Denise Sekaquaptewa, Interview Participant

AR: Okay. So, we are rolling now, and we're in Ann Arbor, Michigan at the University of Michigan on November 17, 2017. I have a really easy request of you to get started: that is, if you can state your full name and place and date of birth for the record?

DS: Denise Joyce Sekaquaptewa. Date of birth? March 2, 1965 in Wiesbaden, Germany.

AR: Great! Thanks so much. Okay, so I'd like to start by having you tell us how you got interested in, or the development of your interest in gender, diversity, stereotyping, and so on. How did that interest develop? Or, where does it come from?

DS: Yeah. Well when I first got into psychology as an undergrad I wasn't studying those issues. I was working in labs just learning about how to do research. Towards the end of that time, I began doing some work about intergroup perception, working on a project that kind of introduced me to that world of research. And then I started applying to graduate programs then, in social psychology. I was reading about programs and starting to look for more of that intergroup relations research being done. And in that search, I started to find all these researchers that were studying things around... I was particularly interested in stereotype and processes, and so that became my focus when I got into graduate school. Initially, I was really into how stereotypers, people behind stereotypes, use them in their evaluation and perception of other people, often in an unintended way. I did a lot of implicit stereotyping work. Later on, I began being interested in the other side of things: the target of various stereotypes, prejudices, and biases. That got me more into the stereotype threat research, and in particular the experience of solo status which is what I really became more involved in as I got later in my work, trying to understand experience of being different from everyone else in terms of a salient social identity in a particular context, And that really connected with me because, as a Native American student and researcher, I was generally in that position all the time.

(2:44)

AR: Right. So, can we go back to that a little bit? Maybe you can tell me a little bit more about your upbringing? And the experience of being a member of the Navajo nation?

DS: And Hopi.

AR: Yes, and Hopi. Yes. So if you could tell me a little bit more about your growing up and also just how you got originally interested in psychology.

DS: Yeah, okay. Well, I grew up in Arizona. Both of my parents – my dad was from the Hopi tribe and my mom is from the Navajo or Diné tribe, which are in close proximity in northern Arizona so they both lived up there, grew up there, and then actually met each other down in Phoenix. By the time I came along, the family was living down in Phoenix so I've never lived on either reservation, although we did go out there in summers and such. I grew up in Tempe which was near Arizona State University. It was funny to me when I think back on it, as there was never really any strong expectation that I would go to that university because none of the kids in the family really... There were six kids, and I was the fourth, and people weren't really college-bound (laughs).

AR: Yeah. It didn't get talked about as something that you would...it wasn't an expectation, or it wasn't talked about as an expectation. Yeah.

DS: Yeah. My parents got divorced and we moved around a lot. This is kind of the unusual part: we moved around so much that it became... I could look at my high school progress which wasn't very good because of not transferring stuff, and I became independent from my family pretty early, I moved out. So actually, I don't have a high school diploma. Eventually I went and got a General Equivalency Diploma. So, I was just working in a restaurant since I was 17, and I came to realize at some point that that's a career, or I can do something else (laughs). Because they were offering me other positions in the restaurant business and then I said, "You know, sorry."

I started going to community college and that's where I got interested in psychology. I remember I could take two courses. This was after work, so I'm coming after work at night, and I could take two courses. The first course was English, because I thought I was going to be a writer. The other one was Intro to Psychology because it sounded interesting. I had seen a psychology textbook before, so I thought, "This could be cool." As soon as I got there, I was like "Okay. This is what I want to do." Very soon, I realized that I wanted to be a professor, because I was really fascinated by the research, experiments, and so I just had to figure out what I had to do to get there. I could see that you had to be doing research, so I just tried to find opportunities to connect.

AR: Was there anyone at the community college that kind of helped you at all?

(6:13)

DS: Yes. So one of the professors there, his name is David Dalby. He's passed on now, but I worked in his...well, I wouldn't say his lab because, in that community college you didn't do that kind of research. But he was collecting data on student performance and different things like that he let me get involved in. I think that was pretty formative. I got a chance to see what professors do and I helped out in the psychology office, you know, things like that.

AR: So really, you were engaged in that.

DS: Yeah. So then, I did make the transfer over to Arizona State University. And then, finally, I was able to work more in research labs there. I've had a pretty long connection to research, beginning pretty early. I knew I wanted to do research and experiments, but I didn't know in what area until I took intro to social psychology. Then I thought, "Okay, that's what I need to do."

AR: And I mean, there's really a fascinating tradition of experimentation in social psychology. Some of the things we think of as psychology were you, you know, social psych classics, right? You know, my imagination was quite caught by that as an undergrad.

Tell me a little bit more about you, as you were making your way through community college and realizing that you wanted to become a professor in psychology. You had moved out away from your family at that point. Do you remember if they had any reaction, or response to that? Your family.

DS: I think that they were very supportive. They couldn't help it. They thought it was a good idea, yeah. I imagine that they wish they could have helped a little bit, but I was able to make my way by figuring out, you know, the programs, the systems, that kind of thing. And there were also things available through the tribe. They offer a scholarship that I tried to apply for. I tried to apply for everything. So, I was able to figure it out.

AR: So when you were at Arizona State then, did you have any mentors there? Was there anyone?

DS: Yeah. I worked in labs and did an honors thesis. I really knew a number of the professors there. I think the ones who were the most influential were probably my honors thesis advisor, who helped me on that year-long project. His name was John Rich. The other one was Bob Cialdini, I think he is pretty well-known. He was the one that taught the Intro to Social Psych class that I was in. That caught my interest. So, I think both of those folks were very influential. But you know, I was working with other people there. Yeah, it was a good experience.

AR: This is asking you to go pretty far back, but do you remember what your honors thesis was? (Laughs)

(9:27)

DS: (chuckles) My honors thesis. Yeah, it was on locus of control and help-seeking. So, are people who have internal versus external locus of control more likely to seek out assistance on various things.

AR: Yeah. Right, okay. But then you mentioned that you really knew that social psych was your area and you were getting interested to that point in stereotyping. You know that, so you were actually looking for graduate programs that were...

DS: ...focused in that area, yeah.

AR: Yeah. So tell me how you ended up at Ohio State.

DS: When I was getting ready to apply to graduate programs, I asked, Bob Cialdini, amongst other people, you know, "Where should I apply?" Eventually it came down to a consensus of five schools that I could see were strong programs and had people there doing the kind of work that I wanted to do. I've visited all of these places they were all good schools. I could've gone to any of these schools and it would have been great. So, I was really looking at things like fit with my potential advisor who was Bill von Hippel at Ohio State. When I went to visit, we had a one on one meeting that was supposed to be half an hour. It actually went on to an hour because there was so much to talk about. So, I thought...

AR: "This is a good sign."

DS: "This is a good sign." And I felt comfortable with the program, and living there, and all that. So I thought this is where I could be productive for five years.

AR: Oh, good, good. Do you recall going all through this kind of navigating your way through undergrad and grad school - you mentioned solo status earlier, and sort of being the only... Well, can you tell me a bit about the experience of your awareness of... Did you have an awareness of that? And what was that like, having solo status as a Native American going through these places?

DS: It wasn't something I thought a lot about, even in Arizona State, because there were more Brown faces there than other places. Although, it did come to light in certain circumstances. You know, sometimes instructors would call me out, "And now we can hear the Indian perspective." And, you know, that kind of thing. You know they were more Native American studies courses there. It was more integrated there, or recognized. But then, when I went to Ohio State, it was very different. There, I think I noticed how different I was from others, more in that context, being further away from Arizona.

(12:24)

I remember the first year I went back to Arizona to visit, and saying, "God, there's a lot more people here that look a lot like me." And then, I go back to Ohio and there's not anymore. So yeah, I started recognizing it there.

AR: And I was wondering too, about those feelings being in psychology specifically. I mean obviously in general, but also in psychology and if that had any impact on you that you are aware of at the time.

DS: Yeah. I mean, I guess I just didn't know certainly of any social psychologists who were Native American. I believe that there were some clinical psychologists. When I looked at that, it seemed like a big focus on problems. You know, like very much looking at pathology in the Native communities, and focused on all these negative issues. I knew that these were important

issues, but I always wondered, “Where are the Native Americans who were just in social psych as the study of every day folks?” and it kind of wasn’t there. I think maybe that’s why I didn’t go into clinical psychology, because I kind of wanted to study more general experiences that people have in their everyday lives. It was just a different kind of research.

But yeah, so I did notice that. Later on, I remember, when I first got tenure I went on sabbatical to the University of Arizona for a semester. There, I met Stephanie Fryberg, who you may know, but she’s also Native and she was at the University of Arizona at the time. She was newer then. She was an assistant professor for sure, I don’t remember how many years behind me. When I talked to her, I saw how important it was for her to meet me and know that I was there. She was like “I’ve read about you, I’ve heard about you, and I just wondered what you looked like.” It was important for her to know that that was somebody else in the field, and so we kind of thought, “Are we the only Native American women in social psychology?” I think we were at that time. That’s when I got to see how important it is to know that there are others like you.

AR: right. Which seems to be so much a part of the kinds of things you research, right? Solo versus non-solo status and its impact on your...

DS: Even adding one more person can make a difference.

AR: Yeah. And it clearly did for her. (Laughs) How do you spell her last name?

DS: F – R – Y – B – E – R – G.

AR: Right, right. Is she still at the University of Arizona?

DS: She’s at University of Washington now.

(15:21)

AR: Yeah...okay. You asked about the Women of Color project, and a part of what we’re trying to do. I teach History of Psychology a lot, and it’s just incredible, the way the materials in the history of psychology are not at all diverse in terms of race/ethnicity. Gender has gotten a little bit better, but race/ethnicity has not. So, we are also trying to...I’m working on trying to develop materials that will help change that, and into teaching as well.

DS: Stephanie would be a good person to talk to, because she studies social representation, and actually, the lack of it for Native people. They’re really not present in the media, in the curriculum, and the impact of that on Native kids.

AR: Absolutely. I would love to get in touch with her. Okay, so sort of going back to your career trajectory; so at Ohio State, you worked with Bill von Hippel? Can you tell me a little bit about your dissertation research and your experiences there?

DS: Sure, yeah. I worked with Bill von Hippel, we had various projects that we worked on. Right around dissertation time, when I was trying to decide on my dissertation project, I started

working with Marilyn Brewer. She was actually the primary advisor on my dissertation, although Bill was on the committee. I wanted to branch out a bit and have different lines of research with different people. So, it made sense for me at that point. So that's where I did my solo status work with Marilyn.

So I just started looking at that experience experimentally, randomly assigning people to have in their group be the only woman or be the only African American amongst White students, being the only person of your race there. And examining the influence of that experience, peoples' outcomes, and more specifically interested in performance outcomes. How people did on an oral exam, or test. It's like how you express your knowledge in that situation. We were able to see the negative effect of being the only person of your race or gender compared to women who are randomly assigned to not have that experience. It was a nice experience to be able to see this...the fact that you could see this effect by randomly assigning people means that it's not just if a Black student does poorly it's something about them. It's something about their situation. Look at the contribution of [the situation].

AR: Yeah. You're actually manipulating their context to see its influence. I can't remember the histories of the work on... So the time you're doing this work, on solo status versus non solo status on performance and so on, what was the... This is, again, an unfair question because I'm asking you to think back so far, but what was the state of the social psych research on things like stereotyping and stereotype threat? I can't quite remember myself.

DS: Well, I think the people were studying this situation of solo status but more about how it changes an observer's perception of other people. So you know, the research was saying that when there's only one woman, let's say in a business context, people are more likely to engage in role encapsulation, like she might be expected to make the coffee.

(19:10)

You know, that kind of thing. And people would see her as very different from everyone else with different characteristics and so if there was kind of this sort of contrast effect going on. So it was really about perceptions of people who stand out. I wanted to know more about the experience of people who are different in that way.

AR: Right. And the impact on that person on being able to perform.

DS: Yeah, and just around that time, Claude Steele's paper on stereotype threat came out in 1995. My Ph.D. was in 1997 so I could see how this solo status work should connect to stereotype threat research, because this is a situation where one becomes aware of their social identities, because they're standing out in terms of them. When that happens, the stereotypes about that social identity also become activated. That's why you may see these performance deficits and things like that, for people in solo status situations. So, I was happy to be able to make that connection, and that got me more into that stereotype threat research too.

AR: Yeah, and I read a little bit about your work on stereotypic attribution bias, and I want to get you to talk about a little bit too because that's fascinating (laughs). So your next step, career

wise, when you finished up at Ohio State was to come to Michigan, as I take it. Can you tell me a little bit about that transition to Michigan? What attracted you to Michigan?

DS: Well, you know, Michigan is a very strong department. And a strong program, particularly in social psychology, you know. It was and still is rated as the number one PhD program in social psychology, so I thought, "I should go there. It sounds like a good place to be." I mean, it was a little bit difficult because I had another job offer too, which was at the University of Arizona, which was close to family. But at that point in my life I was like, you know I'm ready to strike out and get out of Arizona and try to be somewhere else. And I thought Michigan had its strengths in research and also seemed to have a lot of good resources for faculty and for new faculty. It just seemed like a place where one could do one's best work. It was a place where I could get a good start and really be able to... I mean, not that that can't happen in another university but it just felt good here. Since then, I've discovered that to be very true. I can see how much the university puts into helping faculty succeed.

AR: Oh, that's great. Yeah. Well, I know that, given when I was talking to Abby Stewart, we talked quite a bit about the ADVANCE Program, and I know you've been involved in that as well. Can you tell me a little bit about how you got involved and what your involvement in that has been?

DS: Yeah, sure. I knew about the ADVANCE program but I wasn't connected to it in any way until I became full Professor. That's when Abby Stewart kind of snapped me up I guess, because she noticed that I became a full [professor] (laughs)

(22:39)

AR: (Laughs). You're not safe anymore. She's coming for you.

DS: Yeah, it was one of those things when you get promoted. You get all these new opportunities. She wanted me to serve in two roles. One was on the Stride Committee. She might've told you about what that is - the faculty recruiting committee, because I had expertise in a lot of the implicit bias work, and things like that. I signed on to become a member of the Stride Committee.

She also, I think around the same time, or maybe shortly after, asked me to be the Associate Director for research at ADVANCE, because again, you know, I had this expertise in the social science side of things. And so, I served in that role for, I think a couple of years. I stayed on the Stride Committee -it's a five-year commitment but I stayed on an extra year because they specifically requested they needed me. So, I said "Okay." So, yeah. I was on it for a while.

AR: And what are your...Give us your impressions of the program. I mean, what has it done? (Laughs)

DS: Oh gosh (Laughs). When Abby first started, I mean, I'm sure she told you this, but it was focused...because it was funded by NSF [National Science Foundation], they had a specific program focus, and that was women in science, and how to promote, recruit, retain that

population. Once it was successful in those first few years users expanded to other social identity groups and other disciplines. It's really become a presence on campus. People are aware of ADVANCE. There are so many ADVANCE programs now. It's something that is part of the institution now. That's a part of what makes us strong. A part of it is also that they keep such good track of records of you know, how many women do we have, and why is there a salary gap? What are the issues around the climate for different people and do they keep tracking these things? And understanding through data collection to identify the problem. What can social science do to help make procedures do things differently, or to address those problems and reanalyze it again. It just goes on and on. I think they've done so much to really benefit the whole university community, which trickles down, right? To students and everyone else.

AR: Absolutely. Well, as Director of Research for Stride, I'm sure you can see firsthand the power of having the data and being on top of it in that way.

DS: Yeah. I wanted to in that role collect data on faculty and understanding the effects of having that experience of taking the Stride faculty recruitment workshop on how they felt about doing more equitable searches, and engaging in these practices that we were saying would produce more equitable searches for new faculty. And also looking at their attitudes towards things like... you know, because in the workshops they work on things like implicit bias and they learn about stereotype threat and other kinds of things, so I asked them about their attitudes about the basic social science principles that underlie the workshop before and after their attendance there, or in samples of faculty who had attended versus faculty who had never attended, and we were able to show, through this empirical way, the significant effect of attending the workshop on faculties' attitudes, behavioral intentions around search practices and stuff. That's when it's really useful, because now the other universities say, "Well, we want to have something like that, but my deans are asking 'How do you know it works? How do you know it's going to be effective?'" And now, they can say "Oh! Well there's my paper!" (Laughs)

AR: That's amazing.

DS: I was really glad to have the opportunity, to make that kind of contribution through my role at ADVANCE.

AR: Absolutely. I had a look at some of the materials on the web... amazing resource. I read a little bit about the Stride program and it's an incredible, incredible... resource. So that people don't have to reinvent the wheel. Incredible stuff.

Well, let's go back a little bit to the development of your own. You've talked about your research with Stride, but also then about your research here in your lab, and specifically the development of things like looking at stereotypic attribution bias and how that plays a role in combination with solo, non-solo status, stereotypes, and so on. I read one of your shorter papers. It was actually a response to another paper, but I loved this - it was responding to some of [Nilanjana] Dasgupta's work. I think your statement about "women's decisions regarding educational pursuits and careers are not necessarily the free choice that we imagine them to be. Stereotypic inoculation models and work on stereotypic attribution bias suggests that these choices can be guided by stereotypes acting as an invisible hand, not only away directing women away from

STEM but also sweeping their STEM success under the rug.” That’s a very important, kind of powerful statement to get people to realize that this is not about making free choices in this unconstrained world, right? So, can you talk about stereotypic attribution bias and your work?

DS: Yeah, sure. That came from some very basic work in person perception that when we encounter things that violate our expectations, often a response is to provide an attribution for it. To provide some kind of explanation in hopes that you can resolve the inconsistency in your mind. So that’s why if you ever have a strong expectation that, you know, “John’s a smart guy,” and he gets a D, then you’re kind of like “Oh. He was probably feeling sick that day.” It kind of helps you preserve your expectations. So, we wanted to understand how stereotypes guide those expectations, right? So, if there’s an expectation that men are going to be good at science, and they do something that’s not good in science and fail your experience, you might explain it away to a circumstance because that helps you preserve that stereotypic expectation.

(29:16)

Similarly for women, if you have an expectation that they’re not going to be good at science or have no interest in it, if they do something really great, there could also be a tendency to explain it away to luck, or that she got lucky somehow. I examined that in some of my earlier work and how, let’s say, White people explain away race-stereotypic inconsistencies in Black people. I’m interested in how people might do that about their own group. Because it’s not necessarily something you know that you’re engaging in or what the implications are. It’s just kind of your gut response about people and if they listen to that, they might say, “You know... Now that you’ve called attention to it, I can hear how that could support stereotypes.” But, it’s not something that people generally analyze in themselves. So, I started examining that among women in science, are they engaging in this tendency to explain away women’s successes while accepting men’s successes in and science. What are the implications of that? Because it’s stereotype-supporting as opposed to the opposite, like if you’re giving women credit for their successes and saying, “Oh, she’s obviously good at this.” And if you’re not explaining away men’s failures, that could be stereotypes-changing. It would help reduce stereotyping. But generally, people to the extent that stereotypes guide us, it helps support them, sustain them. That might have an impact for women in science. If they’re doing this, kind of habitually, what kind of impact might that have on you?

So, we started examining that for women and science and noted that tendency can actually be triggered by the context you’re in, again. I thought that there must be situations where stereotype salience is increased - people may have experienced stereotype threat - those stereotypes get activated then they have their influence on attributions made about men’s and women’s success in science. In a paper that came a little bit after that one, we demonstrated that by exposing women, again, randomly assigned to groups, in one group, women were exposed to a group of other science students supposedly that they were going to interact with on a science task, where they could see an interaction happening in that group where a woman talking about science was receiving a negative reaction from other people in the group. So, she was talking about science and people were shaking their heads, or narrowing their eyes, and that kind of thing. It was kind of negative treatment towards that woman versus in another condition where the participants saw the woman talking about science, it was a positive reaction. It was important that it wasn’t the

participant that experienced this negative reaction from the group. She just saw another woman being the target of it.

We found that people assigned to that condition, witnessing the negative experience of another woman in science, showed more of this attribution bias on a scale we gave them where they gave responses to men's and women's successes in science. They engaged in more stereotypic attribution bias, and the more they did that, the more it lowered their intentions to remain in the field. And we said, "How likely is it that you're going to have a career in this field? How often are you thinking about changing your major?" Those things got diminished to the extent that they engaged in that. So, we really try to show that these situations can actually trigger stereotypes which have a variety of outcomes. One of them is the tendency, and they don't even know that they're doing it, to engage in an attribution pattern that supports stereotypes that people probably don't even know they have.

(33:25)

They don't even know that they're activated and guiding their response. If you asked them, "do you believe that women are not as good at science as men" they would probably say no. They would say, "Of course I believe that women belong in science. Of course I think that they can do this." But it's coming out again and in this subtle way.

AR: You must get this question all the time, but given that much of this is probably happening in a more unconscious, implicit level, what is the intervention?

DS: One intervention is to make academic settings for women more positive and less stereotype-supportive. We've got lots of women to be witnessing negative treatment of other women in science. Things that we can do to make women's environment free from the cues that trigger the stereotypes, that's what I've been thinking about a lot and trying to examine: different kinds of cues. I know that some of the cues are things like representation. I studied that earlier. When you know that you're the only woman there, that's kind of a message about whether women are seen to belong in that kind of setting. So, there's that kind of thing. There are physical objects which is interesting. Sapna Cheryan at the University of Washington studied people who look at a setting devoid of any people, but simply looking at the objects in it. She studied this in women in computer science, and brought them to computer science labs where there were masculine objects. Things that you can look at and say, "Men have probably been in here." It's stereotypic, but things like video-game controllers and Star Trek posters and the sort of stuff that people read as masculine. When they saw that, they didn't want to go in to computer science as much as to when they went into a more neutral room. We study it here in things like what we call "The Wall of Fame." I don't know if you know about this, but when you walk into any academic department, they open up a wall where it's the past department chairs or the awardees of very fancy awards over the years. They tend to be walls of White men. We wondered what kind of message that would send to people who aren't in that category, who aren't older, White men. Can that trigger stereotypes or messages about belonging for these people. We've done studies on that, having people do performance tasks in a setting where there's a display like that versus a more diverse display of people. We find that there has been a difference. It makes a difference. So there are those kind of physical object cues.

Finally, I think the last kind of cue thing that I'm thinking about are things people say and do that may unintentionally send negative messages about belongingness or relate to their stereotypes. Sometimes, people call them micro-aggressions or micro-inequities. There are subtle, little things that can also make the stereotypes salient and send people down that path with negative consequences down the road.

AR: I know that you're working right now on a large grant on micro-aggressions in engineering. Can you talk a little bit about that project? About what you're finding?

(36:51)

DS: Yeah, so I've been working with a collaborator. Her name is Lorelle Meadows. She works here in the college of engineering at the University of Michigan, but now she's up at Michigan Technological University, but we still collaborate. We got connected actually through Abby because Lorelle was teaching these undergraduate engineering courses, and she started noting the role of gender in those. She got together with me and we had a strong association right off the bat, because I was like, "this is such a situation that social psychologists would study." She was looking particularly at teams. In engineering, they work on team projects all the time. You have a setting where men and women are working together in a domain where men are stereotyped as being better than women, and where women are underrepresented. There are only like 20% of women in the College of Engineering, so often these teams are kind of skewed in terms of gender. All of those things are triggering these processes. That's what we started examining. At first, we looked at roles that people played and found that women played more stereotypic roles than men. Men were the experts, and women were taking notes. This kind of thing. Then, we started looking more specifically at the behaviors and the interactions, and that's where we got into the micro-aggression research. The grants we've had have focused on trying to examine these interactions from an observer's point of view. That is, so much micro-aggression research relies on self-report, and with criticism around that. So, we videotaped people in the labs, and groups interacting, trying to see what kinds of behaviors could be classified as reflecting this. I would call it a behavioral manifestation of an underlying stereotype, often unintended but things people say and do. That was part of the project, trying to document these things. Could observers, could we make a procedure in coding these things, and interactions, and seeing what they can predict. We did a lot of work like that, and now our most current projects are on exposing people to groups that have these kinds of stereotypic interactions, versus exposing them to groups that don't, and looking at the outcomes of the procedure. It's kind of like the paper I told you about, seeing it happen. Not even to you, but to someone else can be enough - to trigger stereotype threats and other processes. That's what we've been working on.

AR. Oh, that's fascinating. Women in engineering, I think of it, maybe optimistically, as the last frontier. Computer science and engineering are so heavily male dominated, so this is important. Well, I also know that you have a lab that works with you and that you mentor students. And I know that mentoring gets talked about a lot in terms of the ability to retain and recruit students and faculty of color. So, can you tell me a little bit about your own experiences as a mentor? I've asked you a little bit about who were your mentors but you also mentor. What role does that play in your career?

(40:33)

DS: I've certainly had a lot of students and always had a very active lab. Many students are from underrepresented groups. Not all, but many of them have been. I want to give them a lot of credit because they do so much work and they're all so smart. Our work has to be collaborative, and I always try to think of them as my collaborators. We are working together on this project. I'm trying to give them room to ask their own questions. Of course, I have my own kind of things that I'm doing, so it's a matter of integrating their research interests with things that I have a grant for, and things like that. It's been a really good experience working with students and undergrads as well. We get really good undergrads too, and helping them along.

I also have contact with graduate students through my role as Associate Chair for Diversity here in the department. We do a lot of work around the recruitment and retention of graduate students from underrepresented groups. So, it's been hopeful to interact with them, understand what their concerns are and work with them. We have the student organizations, like Black Students in Psychology, Latino Students in Psychology etc. and we try to help them create the kind of department where they're all going to flourish. It's been good to know the students in my role there, too.

AR: Is that something that's historically at Michigan in the department? Has that been something that you've witnessed and been a part of as it has evolved, or has it always been that way? I'm trying to get a sense of the historical trajectory of these things.

DS: Around the diversity initiatives, and stuff like that?

AR: Around the diversity, especially having a Black Graduate Students Association and a Latino/Latina Students Association. I mean, when did those things start to come into play? That kind of thing.

DS: Michigan has a strong history in things like this. For example, the Black Students in Psychology Association, BSPA, is next year going to recognize their 50th anniversary.

AR: WOW, that's amazing.

DS: So, it started quite some time ago. I'm sure with a very small amount of students, but it has been maintained and other groups followed and organized after that. It's always been present, I think, maybe a little bit more grassroots earlier on, but now it's just part of the structure of our department. We have these organizations that we support. We have events every year, such as the Diversity Recruitment Weekend and the Diversity Research Symposium. There are things like that that we were able to develop. I think Rob Sellers was really the one who got those mostly off the ground. Pat Gurin also, before him being really influential as well. It's really a thing like, if we wanted to support these goals, you've got to have funding, you have got to have somebody to lead this. The fact that they appointed an associate chair for diversity initiatives is a commitment to meeting all those types of goals.

(44:32)

AR: Yeah. Sounds like there's been strong institutional structural support all along the way, from all levels.

You've mentioned the history of the Black Students Psychological Association and there's been some very strong, incredible influential African-American psychologists in Michigan. James Jackson comes to mind at the ISR [Institute for Social Research], and that kind of thing. Because I don't know as much about the exact history of Michigan and the relationship of the ISR to psychology, do you know what has been, or is the relationship between ISR and Psych?

DS: They're separate. They're independent, of course, with psychology being a unit within LSA [Literature, Science, and the Arts]. The ISR isn't a unit, isn't a department. It's multi-disciplinary and with research centers within. The faculty that are only working within ISR are generally research scientists and things like that. The connection is that many of our Psychology Department faculty have a formal association, or affiliation I guess you would say. So, I am a faculty affiliate with the ISR Research Center for Group Dynamics, as most people in social psychology are. There's a steering committee in ISR made up of a lot of psychologists. Some psychologists have their labs that they do work in over there. There's a long-standing colloquium series at ISR that the psychology faculty routinely attends. So, there's connection.

AR: Yeah. So, I wanted to ask a little bit about... I want to be a little respectful of time too, we are at 12:25. Do you need to be done by 12:30?

DS: Not necessarily, but I have something at 1pm.

AR: Okay, we'll spend the next few minutes certainly around wrapping up. (Laughs). I wanted to ask you a little bit about the intersection of... Well, we talk a lot about intersectionality. It's an important conceptual and theoretical idea. I try to ask almost everyone: how do you experience the intersections of your own identity, as a woman, as a Native American? Any other intersections that may not be apparent to me? Is that something that resonates?

DS: Yeah. I think that different identities stand out at different times, right?

AR: Context is important.

DS: Yeah. I'm trying to think of how specifically the intersection happens. I know that I share experiences with women faculty generally, or women generally. That tends to be something that is in conversation a lot. Certainly the ADVANCE program is very aware of that. Even within our department, on our campus, there are networks. There's a network for women scientists within the psychology department, just not a formal network. But there are women groups where you can have a lunch together, and things like that. There's generally a feeling of community amongst women, where we can think about that experience, of gender biases and inequities, and things like that.

(48:17)

For the Native American side, it's really not so much about being Native American specifically, because there's just not a lot around that. But, a person of color, yes. There is a network for faculty of color and I'm part of another organization called Women of Color in the Academy. These are all good ways to connect with people of color. Again with that community and talking about those kinds of issues. I think about the Native American side, it's like Stephanie Fryberg said, we're just not represented in a lot of places. Although, here in this department, we have another Native American faculty member, Joseph Gone, and I can think of a handful more on campus, but yeah, it's really been a thing.

AR: Given all of the work that you do and the research on this, what do you see as the challenges or barriers to getting more Native Americans into the academy?

DS: Gosh. I would say it starts so early, right? There's already problems in the schools - tribal schools and stuff at the elementary level that make it really difficult to be able to bounce back from that. So, there is that kind of historical bad start. There's a lot of work to be done at that level. I think things like mentoring, outreach can help. There have been points in my career and how I got here, where specific people mentioned or reached out to me in some way. Like, when the professor would have me come work in his office or in a lab. When I got this job, I know Pat Gurin was the chair at that time. I didn't know this, but I guess she contacted my advisor when I was in fourth-year in graduate school, and arranged for me to come here to Michigan to give a brown bag talk. I just thought it was [makes nonchalant face] just a brown bag talk. They probably thought that I was nearby, or they wanted to hear about this kind of work or something. I didn't know it was a pre-job interview kind of thing. So, I did that, and found out later that that's what it was. And then, the next year, I got invited for the real job interview and I got a job. So, I think it's a matter of looking, finding these folks and making that connection. If you wait for them to come to you....there's so few of them out there. I think that active recruitment...telling somebody who might not really have come to realize their potential here, you know "You could do this. You should think about getting a PhD."

AR: Planting that seed is so important. Right.

DS: Or even telling people what graduate school is. I mean, I'm lucky I found out pretty early what it meant. But other people, they don't know and they don't do what they need to do until all of a sudden, they're in junior or senior year and it's too late. You have to have a history of connecting to research to get into it. So, being able to identify these students really early and reach out to them, give them that message, and plant that seed as you say, can really make people motivated to find out what they need to do and come to believe that they can actually do this.

(52:20)

AR: Absolutely. At this point in your career, what would you say are the contributions that you're most satisfied with, or that you feel have been the most valuable or important?

DS: I've really been happy to have the opportunity to do experimental research on topics that people sometimes only know about through anecdotes or stories in the media and so on. They don't really talk about things like experience with bias, the experience of being the target of stereotyping, or of being the target of micro-aggressions and things like that. Being an experimental social psychologist, I get the opportunities to provide more, and I think more compelling evidence of the prevalence of these things and their impact on people by being able to randomly assign people to experiences or not, and looking at the impact on important outcomes. I know that I do this mostly in the lab. I don't really do much "in the world interventions," but certainly this lab research can inform those things. I can always do that later.

Yeah, so I've been most happy to be able to do the solo status research to do the things we're doing now, with being exposed to micro-aggressions and things. I'm hoping that people can be convinced to change policy by looking at solid research evidence and instead of being able to explain away individual people's stories, which unfortunately I think can happen. That's where I feel like there are important social issues: the underrepresentation of women in science, the lack of diversity in science, and how that isn't good for science. It isn't good for women. So, there's a way to use research to help do something to address those issues.

AR: Absolutely. Is there anything I haven't asked about, or haven't covered, that you would like to make sure we have as a part of the interview?

DS: I can't think of anything right now but I guess if something comes to me...

AR: Yeah, I know. I always end with that. It's sort of a way to make sure that there aren't any glaring omission, or something I may not have picked up on. But that's great. I think that's a really good place to end.

(55:22)