

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**

**Interview with Jean Lau Chin**

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford  
San Antonio, TX  
February 2, 2006*

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JLC – Jean Lau Chin, interview participant

AR – Alexandra Rutherford, interviewer

WP – Wade Pickren, interviewer

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JLC – I was born in New York City, Brooklyn, New York, and my date of birth is July 27, 1944.

AR – I want to get started by asking you about one aspect of your identity, because I know there are lots of different aspects and I want to cover a lot of them tonight, but I thought where we'd start is with your identity as a psychologist. Can you describe for us what the process of becoming a psychologist was like for you?

JLC – I was always interested in psychology, I think as far *[back]* as about junior high or high school. So I went into college with that interest, and particularly of psychoanalytic theory. I just enjoyed learning about people and about how they think. When I went on to college, I considered majoring in psychology or math. I actually chose math first, but I had math professors who were not very motivating. And I took advanced calculus and geometry, and all of that, and because of the nature of those courses I decided that no, I was going to major in psychology. My initial inclination not to major in psychology was because I knew it meant a graduate degree, and that's why I didn't major in psychology to start with.

AR – Okay.

JLC – Well actually to begin with, my initial plan was to graduate from high school and become a typist; that was my career goal [Laughs].

AR – Okay, well tell me a little bit more about that, was that something you...

JLC – Well, some of that actually is related to family background and culture. My parents were immigrants and the idea of getting a high school education was considered a real accomplishment. In the village from where my parents had immigrated in China, my father had completed a ninth grade education and my mother had completed a sixth grade education; therefore, my father was considered more highly educated. So the idea of finishing high school was considered a real accomplishment. The idea of going on to college was not viewed as being important because of the standard against which they were measuring, but also because *[of my]* being female. So my parents thought that I would finish high school and go out to work; typing was a skill that would enable me to get a job.

AR – And it had certain, in terms of gender, it was gender appropriate.

JLC – That's right. During that time, being a typist or a secretary was the ideal and typical for women. I had not planned to go on to college; but, fortunately I had some high school teachers who essentially said to us, 'You will go to college!' So all in my class applied to college; I got in.

I initially majored in math because I figured I could work with a bachelor's degree whereas majoring in psychology meant I would have to go on to graduate school.  
{3:36}

AR – Let me just follow up on that thread because you said it was teachers in high school that kind of said to you, you're going to college.

JLC – Right.

AR – How did you take that information?

JLC – Well, I was compliant essentially. In the Chinese culture, teachers are accorded great respect. So basically I accepted – if this is what you tell me, this is what I'll do especially because I was part of an honours program. I don't know I would have thought about going to college because my parents didn't have it in their worldview basically. My father, having finished a ninth grade education, felt that finishing high school would have been an accomplishment already.

AR – So how did they, when you did go to college, how did they respond? Or what were their reactions?

JLC – They were pleased because certainly there's a value placed on education within the Chinese culture. But there was also the dilemma of their feeling that women did not need an education because they were only going to get married and raise a family. Therefore, an education for women was not considered essential, whereas for males it was considered more important. But they weren't opposed to it; they supported my going to college, but they weren't able to support the financing of it.

AR – And how did this play out, I know that you have an older brother.

JLC – Right.

AR – How did that education play out for him, in terms of your relationship with him?

JLC – Well he went on to college. Actually all my siblings, my brother and my sister, went on to college; my parents were basically supportive of education. It was really the issue of graduate school. When I finished college, my father again expected me to go to work as he did when I graduated from high school. When I graduated from college and said I'm going to graduate school, he said, 'What? More school?!' At that point, I had to explain what psychology was. They said, 'Why are you going for more school?' I said, majoring in psychology requires it. My parents both speak Chinese, so I had to explain this in Chinese to them. I'm proficient in Chinese but there is vocabulary you don't use in your everyday language, like psychology. So after an elaborate explanation of what psychology was, I remember my mother saying at one point, saying 'Oh! You're going to be a brain surgeon.' Since I was describing studying the mind, the only way she could understand the studying of the mind is you go *into* the mind.

AR – Oh the physical

JLC – The physical.

AR – Oh that’s interesting. Now tell me a little bit, you’ve started to tell me, but what turned you on to psychology and specifically psychoanalytic approaches?

{6:40}

JLC – I enjoyed the understanding of the intricacies of human behaviour basically, understanding motivation, and understanding dynamics. But I quickly got conditioned, out of psychodynamic theory because at Brooklyn College when I took my first intro psych course, I didn’t realize--I was naïve back then--I didn’t realize that the professor was a behaviourist. So I wrote an honours paper on psychoanalysis and had that ripped apart.

I was severely criticized for writing a paper on psychoanalysis. I got my honours credit but I realized quickly that you don’t talk about psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic theory at that point. When I went to graduate school, the emphasis at Teachers College was not psychoanalytic but more systems theory, and having students find their own theory rather than teaching a particular theory. So again, psychoanalysis or psychoanalytic theory was not considered to be the aspiration as a theoretical model. So I again got conditioned out of that. Then I ended up in Boston. I did my internship at Boston Medical Center, and Boston is very psychoanalytic. When I went for my first job at the clinic, I was asked what my theoretical orientation was, and I said, ‘Well, if there’s anything I’m not, it’s psychoanalytic’ [Laughs].

AR – Oh!

JLC – And that was again naivete because I didn’t have the kind of mentors to guide me. Today, we talk frequently about the mentoring of young professionals – there was no such thing in either my community or in the profession about mentoring. I had to learn all this stuff on my own, so I didn’t know the kinds of responses to make or know the culture of the professional environment I was in. Nevertheless, I got the job, and am proud to say that I went on to be the director of the clinic.

AR – Well you kind of anticipated my next question, and in some ways answered it of course, and it was going to be, did you have mentors in graduate school. And you said that really there weren’t any mentors.

JLC – Yeah, there really weren’t because the whole idea of mentorship was not a known concept when I went to school. There was really no support for students from ethnic minority backgrounds; members of my family and ethnic community were not familiar with graduate school education. That’s very different now .. Faculty in graduate programs just assumed that everyone knew what graduate school was all about; they also assumed that everyone knew how to navigate the system and all; I had to learn all that stuff on my own. I had to learn things that actually were very related to culture--really unlearn things that were very related to culture. In the Chinese culture, the idea of learning is you take in and you listen; this is in contrast to Western methods where you’re supposed to participate in the classroom, you’re supposed to raise your hand. And so the learning style that I was taught - and it wasn’t necessarily consciously taught - was that the good learner is the one who listens. That didn’t work so well at first in graduate school because they expected something very different. I had to learn then the hard way that this is not the skill that would get me through. Without mentors, I had to do it trial and error.

{11:05}

AR – So for you it was a matter of learning as you went.

JLC – That's right.

AR – And observing what might be expected of you in a different context.

JLC – That's right.

AR – Well tell us a little bit about, in terms of your graduate school work, where were your research interests at that point?

JLC – My research interest was--I was in a school psychology program, and the reason why I chose [that] was that I thought I could complete a Master's and go on to become a school psychologist. But when I got into the program, they expected us to complete the doctoral program.

AR – This is at Teachers College?

JLC – This was at Teachers College. I felt I got a good education there, but they didn't expect you to stop at the Master's level. I went on and completed the doctorate so that I wouldn't feel like a dropout [Laughs]. Because it was a school psychology program, my emphasis in research was on cognitive styles. But again, I needed to learn the hard way about how to conduct research to complete my studies. No one in the university was interested in cognitive styles; only I was interested in cognitive styles. I needed to learn that you should really pick an area that the professors would be interested in, because they would provide more support for that. I spent a couple of years actually doing a dissertation project on cognitive styles; however, the theoretical dissonance for the professors was such that they couldn't accept the project. So ultimately, I dropped the project on which I had worked for two or three years, and went on to do my dissertation on the development of relational concepts in children from ages 5 – 13, one of my professor's interests. I completed my dissertation within a year, and continued my interest in cognitive styles, but not for my dissertation.

AR – And you were able to find someone in the program?

JLC – Well I learned that the hard way, by spending three years, being encouraged to think independently, only to have the project rejected.

AR – Right.

JLC – And again, because of the absence of mentors, no one could coach me through on what to do and how to go about getting a project that would be accepted. They continually encouraged me with the idea; they said 'Oh this is great,' and so on. But they couldn't accept what they saw to be theoretical flaws, so they didn't accept the project ultimately.

AR – Well tell me a little bit about what Teachers College was like

{14:00}

JLC – Ultimately, I felt like I got a good experience. They taught me, really to be proud of being a psychologist. I got some good skills on both assessment and intervention, and on how to be a professional psychologist. I think the idea of a professional identity, the idea of a systematic focus in terms of research and of assessment, were also very valuable. I think the thing that was lacking was the absence of a cultural framework, which ultimately was where my career and work took me as a focus. So there was a good foundation in terms of the kinds of things that I learned.

AR – Tell us a little bit about how that cultural focus...

JLC – Well, it became one of the areas on which I focused because of what others expected of me. I would say that I didn't go into psychology to specialize in this area of cultural issues. But the first talk that I was ever asked to give as a new staff psychologist for the Boston Psychoanalytic Society was about the Asian culture as it related [*to psychoanalysis*]. That request that was simply [*based on*] the fact that I was Chinese American. These kinds of experiences shaped a bit of who you become and the kind of work you do, and is true for many ethnic minorities or Asian Americans. You're often expected to be an expert in an area simply because you're of that particular ethnic group. After that first talk, I began to incorporate, both in my thinking, my practice, my methods, and my study, the need to shift and integrate all these experiences - the more behavioural emphasis from my undergraduate work, the more systems emphasis from my graduate studies at Columbia, the more psychodynamic part from my work in Boston, and the cultural issues from the fact that people do not forget the fact that I'm Asian American. This influences the therapeutic encounter; it influences how people view and see [*me*] and [*what they*] expect of me; it is an important context and reflects what you bring, and what people expect of you, when you walk into any situation.

AR – Tell me a little bit too about how gender intersects with that as well.

JLC – I think that, not unlike many ethnic minority women, race and ethnicity is an important first defining variable of one's identity, by virtue of the fact that, professionally or personally, people see me first as being Chinese American or Asian American, and second as anything else. So the issue of gender is important, but the race and ethnicity comes first. Growing up, the first question people would ask of me was always whether I was Chinese or Japanese; it wasn't anything else. This was in both professional and personal circles. It was not until I got older, where there was an emphasis on gender and the women's movement. I think that for myself, as well as most ethnic minority women, that it's the intersection of both that is important, never one or the other in and of itself.

Now there are some issues with gender that I think are very important. One is the fact that when we look at Confucian philosophy within the Asian culture, it is male-dominated and hierarchical; males have the preferred position. But what's also interesting, and this is what I found in some of the research for my recent book, is that while Confucian philosophy is viewed as the primary form of thought for Asians and for Chinese, there has also been an emphasis within the Chinese culture on Taoism. Taoism as a philosophy has been embraced by women within China; it favours a more equitable, and gender equitable, environment. These were discussed in my book *Learning from My Mother's Voice*, as principles that my mother emphasized. I never thought about it explicitly that she was teaching me about gender, but she communicated this philosophy that there could be an equality between the sexes, or that there could be strength among women,

even though the dominance of Confucius philosophy made males dominant and preferred. I think that this drives how I use this philosophy in my professional work, therapy with males and females, and how I help women and men deal with gender issues.

{20:35}

AR – Right, right. Can you speak a little bit more about that, how has that entered into your professional practice?

JLC – Well one concept I introduced was hierarchical transference. I had done a conference on Asian American psychotherapy and on what happens in the therapeutic relationship related to both culture and gender. Actually, the gender issues came out more surreptitiously, because we were initially focused on culture. As we raised questions about transference and what happens in the transference relationship, we found that there was very little discussion in the literature about hierarchy, and its role within the “transference relationship” One of the concepts that I formulated was that given the importance of hierarchy within the Asian culture, there will be an influence on what happens in psychotherapy when an Asian client enters the therapeutic relationship. At this conference, we found that Yes, Asians will come into a therapeutic situation expecting the therapist to be the authority, and will behave toward the therapist as an authority figure. Moreover, this is not necessarily an issue of power as it is an issue of hierarchy, where the ascribing of respect is needed before they can accept the authority of the therapist.

Now what happens then with gender is that when the authority figure is a male therapist, we found it more difficult for males to transcend that hierarchy in a male-on-male relationship whereas it was easier for women to transcend that relationship whether the therapist was female or male. We interpreted this to be due to the fact that males lose power and status in that relationship, so they’re less willing to give it up, whereas women gain status and power in that relationship, so they’re more willing to embrace and deal with that hierarchy in terms of the transference relationship. We also found some interesting interactions between gender and culture that have major implications for what therapists should do in the therapeutic situation with diverse clients.

AR – Right. Well let me actually jump back to something you briefly mentioned, which was the women’s movement. What impact did the women’s movement, or what involvement in the women’s movement or awareness of it, did you have?

JLC – I think for me the emphasis on ethnicity was more important than the emphasis on gender. If you examine the evolution of cultural competence and how it has shifted in the field from cultural sensitivity - in which it said that people need to be sensitive to people from other cultures – to cultural competence with diverse groups. The problem, and its evolution in the field, was that you can be sensitive, but that didn’t mean that you were necessarily competent. That has been a focus of a lot of the work that I have done; we found that therapy with ethnic minority clients was less effective if we didn’t pay attention to issues of culture. The women’s movement then came about and grew strong in the 60s among white women; but many ethnic minority women, including myself, didn’t initially embrace being part of the movement because our emphasis and our identity, lay more with our ethnicity than our gender given the state of things. As it evolved, however, we began to ask about its intersection, and we felt the need to incorporate do by examining the difference; that no it’s not the same for myself or other ethnic

minority women as it is for someone who is a white woman. You're dealing with different issues and dealing with those different issues is critical. So it's not simply that we are all women.

{25:33}

AR – Right.

JLC – We need to recognize that yes we're women together, but there are differences in our experiences based for example on how we are perceived. And I think it's with that inclusiveness or that recognition of difference inherent in feminist principles, that enables us to have a dialogue and say, yes, gender is a part of us, but you can't expect us to think and feel and behave in exactly the same way. I think that's what's evolved; we now talk more about, the intersection between gender and ethnicity.

When I go back and look at some of the research I did with my recent book, I did a lot of research looking at gender within China and how that evolved. I was surprised actually to find that women activism and thought, not unlike the women's movement in the U.S., had actually occurred even earlier in China; there were philosophical thinking on the status of women; there was rebellion against the status quo and of male-dominated society within China. So the common misperception that ethnic minority women are not advanced enough in their thinking about women's issues is actually not true. If we look at what happened in China, you can see evidence as early as 1929 of a strong women's movement within China that actually paralleled or exceeded some of the thinking that occurred in the U.S. in the 60s.

AR – This is kind of a historical question because as you have pointed out, a person like myself who is coming in as a fairly junior person, I take feminism as it is now and I think yes, it's inclusive of differences in race and ethnicity, in addition to gender, and that's part of feminism. But I think what you're pointing out here is that that just didn't happen; it was because ethnic minority women demanded that ethnic status sometimes counts before being a woman.

JLC – Right.

AR – So from your perspective, is that accurate to say that, and I've been digging through the Division 35 archives, and what's kind of interesting is to see some of the criticisms, not criticisms, but observations that the feminist cause was a white women's middle class kind of cause. But that has changed. What is your sense historically of how that change took place?

JLC – I do think that the feminist movement started as a white women's middle class cause in terms of looking for equity. But for ethnic minority women, *[the primary emphasis has not been on the gender issues, but on the racial and ethnic issues]* related to oppression within U.S. society. This was more prominent and much more influential to our very survival, both personally and professionally, because we are very much viewed as ethnic first, and women second. That's what was different in the feminist movement because white women are not viewed as white first; therefore they wanted to be viewed as women first. In my view, if white women were to be true to feminist principles and be inclusive, they needed to include all women, not just white women. And in doing so, then they had to grapple with the fact that ethnic minority women have a different experience, and it's not simply just letting us join you and be like you. For example, when I walk into a room and there's a guest list with the name Chin, everybody picks out that I must be the Chin.



{30:23}

AR – Right, wow.

JLC – Right? And if there's another Asian person in the room, many will assume that person must be related to me in some form. That doesn't happen for someone's who is white. When you walk into the room, they don't assume that anyone else who is white is your husband or your wife. So it's a different experience.

AR – Yeah.

JLC - That's the part that needed to be acknowledged. I think it was important that feminist principles of inclusiveness forced feminist women to struggle with that. In that struggle, we began to have those, quote "difficult dialogues"; we've come to the point of being able to recognize and accept that you may have different experiences, but that's okay. That being inclusive does not mean that everybody has to be the same and have to feel the same, or do the same. I remember a conversation about advocacy as one of the feminist principles; it was said that part of being a feminist was to be a vocal and explicit advocate. Well that may not necessarily be what feminist women from different cultures might embrace. Must one necessarily openly advocate to be considered feminist? There may be different reasons for this. Some groups with a history of oppression felt threatened if they took certain stances; others faced life threatening consequences. So you need to look at this a little differently.

AR – And how has that, I mean that sounds like a challenge, I guess to put it positively. I suppose you could also say a struggle, to educate people about that and to find a place for yourself that feels personally, professionally, and ideologically right for you, in terms of negotiating all these different identities. What have been the kind of challenges to that or the struggles?

JLC – Well I think it is important to have a strong sense of one's own identity. Without that, it's harder to deal with these challenges because they will often feel like an assault to one's sense of identity. You need to feel comfortable with yourself because, it's hard enough dealing with these issues without feeling as if you're being questioned and doubted, because you in fact are.

AR – Yeah.

JLC –I think the emphasis on identity is an important one, but the challenge is how the issue of identity then is viewed within the profession. For ethnic minority women, identity and its struggles needs to be viewed within a normal developmental process and as normal developmental phenomena, rather than pathologized way as it often is. In viewing it as a developmental process, it suggests that we're thinking about it frequently because that's the first question we get when people see us. In framing it this way, we are able to speak from a position of strength; we are speaking from a position of assurance; this enables us and deal with these issues and negotiate the dilemmas posed by the struggles.

{34:45}

AR – I was looking at the video from the Diverse Women Leaders Symposium last year and when you got up to the podium you spoke a little bit about not only what it's like to be Chinese American and a woman, but also petite, and that these were all challenges to the idea of being a leader.

JLC – Yeah.

AR – So I wanted to ask you then about leadership and how you've become interested in leadership and feminist leadership. So if you could describe the evolution of that.

JLC – My interest in leadership came about after I had been in a number of positions of leadership all of which have actually been quite diverse. The first role was director of a child guidance clinic; I went from there to become the executive director of a community health centre; from there, I was regional director at a managed care company, and then I was system-wide dean at Alliant International University; each of these positions were in very different institutions and roles. What's interesting is that I feel I fell into those positions of leadership. I don't feel it was initially what I had in my mind. It was not that I thought, 'Oh, I want to be a leader and this is what I'm going to do to get there.' In writing the book on feminist leadership, it seemed as if many feminist women also ended up doing by default. In my case, there was an issue in the institutions of which I was a part; there was a role to be filled; there were changes that occurred, and I felt that I was in a position to be able to do make change; taking a leadership role essentially enabled me to effect change within the institution. So I ended up, as I said, falling into these positions of leadership because I wanted to see things happen and I wanted to make changes. These positions ended up being very satisfying and very gratifying because I felt that I was able to do something significant. What we found common amongst many feminist women was that they took positions of leadership in order to make social change and address social justice issues. This seems in contrast, as we think, to the reasons why men seem to take positions of leadership, which is to attain positions of status or positions of respect. It was the means to what we wanted to accomplish as opposed to the position itself. I feel that is essentially how I ended up in positions of leadership, in order to achieve the purpose I wanted to accomplish.

AR – Yeah. Well let me switch gears a little bit and talk more about some of your organizational work. First of all, how did you get involved in Division 35?

JLC – Actually that was interesting. When Pam Reid, who is an African American woman was division president, she felt that it was important for Division 35 to become more diverse in its leadership and its membership. So she personally made it her task to recruit more women of colour into Division 35. She called me up and asked whether I would take on the role of chairing the Task Force for Asian American women; I reluctantly agreed because I had not been involved with Division 35. But it was because of the personal persuasion by Pam that I agreed to do it. Once I started getting involved in Division 35, I did find and felt a--, I felt syntonc with many of the values that Division 35 expressed in terms of feminism. It ultimately has become a home in terms of sharing and intersecting with not only the feminist values, but in terms of ethnic and cultural issues. In other words, the division didn't say that it was an either/or; rather the division has worked hard at making sure that the issues of race, ethnicity and gender intersected.

{40:00}

AR – Right, right. And you’ve been really involved in 35, I mean you’ve been president and so on, and have continued your involvement.

JLC – Right.

AR – So from that perspective, as someone who has been involved in 35 and has been involved as a proponent and advocate for Asian American women in 35, what do you see as the strengths of the division, and then also what do you see as the weaknesses of the division?

JLC – I think the strengths are the feminist principles of inclusion, of valuing all voices, and of collaboration. Many of the core feminist values are in fact its strength. People are truly committed to that; I’ve seen members truly struggle with its implications. While it’s a strength, at the same time we are all often unable to see beyond our own lens. While we may all subscribe to these feminist principles, sometimes how they play out in reality is not so easy. Whenever it is suggested, whether it’s explicit or implicit, that we are not following those values, I see members struggling with that. And that’s good, partly because they’re truly attempting to be true to feminist values. At the same time, it becomes a weakness when the emphasis on consensus that debate continues to try and reach a hundred percent consensus; then we can get bogged down in the process such that things cannot get done. That is where the values and principles become detrimental to being able to move forward because there are times in which you can’t have total consensus.

AR – Yeah.

JLC - Also I think the fact is that - that’s also what we saw during my presidential initiative on feminist leadership - while we may all hold these feminist principles and values, there are contexts and situations in which you can’t exercise them even though you believe in them. The struggle then becomes a problem because it prevents us from being as effective as we might like, when you continue to try to behave in a way that the context does not support.

AR – Right.

JLC – In a masculinized context, contexts that expect leadership to be defined by decisiveness, consensus and collaboration can be viewed as weakness.

AR – Right, right.

{43:28}

JLC –That then becomes a problem. The ability of Division 35, and of women, to be able to discriminate those situations in which to behave more, quote “decisively” is essential, so that they can choose when to do so, and develop the skill that they need .

AR – Okay. So not to be bound by the principles but have the flexibility to see when you can’t apply them and then to apply other principles.

JLC – That’s right.

AR – Let me ask you again on this organizational theme, you served on the Committee on Ethnic Minority Affairs at APA in the mid '90s.

JLC – Right.

AR – Can you tell me a little bit about your work on that committee, if you can think back to that period

JLC – Yeah, that's way back.

AR – But thinking back to your work on the committee and the role of the committee, can you comment on your experience there?

JLC – I think the one thing that I remember was that CEMA was the first APA committee that I was on. **Alberto Figuaroa** who staffed it was excellent in that he played a very important mentoring role about APA governance. He provided an excellent learning ground for me to really understand what APA governance was all about and its complexity. It's a matter of, to get things done, you need to know how to get things done. That's where I found Alberto as a staffer for the committee to be very astute in mentoring committee members about how things get done. We were then able, I believe, to take positions or make actions that would advance the cause of ethnic minority affairs in a way that would be effective, because you can do things within APA, but may not be effective.

AR – Yeah, you could spin your wheels for a long time

JLC – Yes, you could spin your wheels for a long time. I think he was able to give us some strategies about recognizing what it is you need to do, about what will work and what won't work. That was a very helpful experience for me and enabled me to figure out the best ways to go about making sure you accomplish what you want to do. And that's really differentiating between the means and the end; that sometimes you need to do a lot of things to get to an end.

WP – Within the organizational theme, can you talk a bit about your involvement with the Asian American Psychological Association and what role you've seen it play and your perspective on it.

JLC – You're talking about AAPA specifically?

WP – Yes.

{46:50}

JLC – I've been a member of AAPA for quite a number of years. I've been involved in various roles. I can remember back in the '70s, I think that was when AAPA first started, it really was the place where we could all go and have a sense that, "Oh, here are some individuals, professionally, who shared something in common, both professionally and as Asian Americans". That was really important because APA, which is so much larger compared to the number of Asian American psychologists which is so few. I think because the common thread or basis for the association is ethnicity, then diversity is quite important given the range of groups within AAPI communities. It is a challenge because having a critical mass enables you to look at a different agenda. Outside of APA for example, I remember being in Boston and wanting to do

some stuff on mental health; I tried to convene mental health professionals on Asian American issues; there was only a handful of people, two or three people. I was the first Asian American psychologist actually to be licensed in Massachusetts, and I don't think I'm that old! [Laughs]. It is simply a matter of numbers; when we tried to convene mental health professionals to address Asian American issues, we couldn't simply limit ourselves to psychologists because there weren't any. We had to be more broad and include social workers and other professionals in order to have a critical mass. To look at Asian American issues, not only within the Asian American Psychological Association, but in general, we have to cast a wider net in order to have a critical mass. But in doing so, you have to shape your issues differently because everyone's not going to have the same agenda .

AR – Yeah, Wade just interviewed Alvin Alvarez and he spoke about coming to the Asian American Psychological Association and feeling like there was a community of people with whom he felt that he could come and share common interests, professional interests, with, and he didn't have to justify it. There was that commonality and there was a sense of okay, I don't have to expend energy trying to justify what I do. I can just do what I do and talk about it with other people.

JLC – Yeah.

AR – And that for him was a real important role of AAPA.

JLC – And that's true. That's what I mean by the critical mass concept; when you're the single one, then you have to speak for, and you're often asked to speak for, the group, or asked to explain about the group. But when there is a critical mass, there is a joint acknowledgement and you can move on from there very quickly. And the sense of affinity becomes an important one in terms of being able to move on.

AR – Well let me get back to the issue of multicultural competencies. I know you spent a lot of your work, your research, your writing, your practice, on this issue. So I wanted to get your impression of the current state of clinical psychology and counselling psychology, but let's start with clinical for the moment, in terms of how much it has incorporated the idea of multicultural competencies into actual training. What is your assessment of the state of that?

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JLC – Okay. I did a policy paper on the state of cultural competence in the state of Massachusetts. I think it is important to look at the evolution of the concept and what cultural competence meant in the system of care. Early on, as I mentioned before, there was a strong emphasis on cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. There grew a disenchantment with the fact that sensitivity in and of itself was not sufficient; often you had individuals who either took courses or learned about different cultural groups, but did not then have the skills and the awareness about what to do; that led to a shift in focus on cultural competence. There's been a lot of work, more within the public sector, and the public mental health system, in terms of looking at cultural competence instead of cultural sensitivity. What's been important is some of the developments. One development is that the quote cultural competence “movement” has resulted in some important mandates; for example, if you aren't culturally competent then you don't have access to state grants. The state of California requires that all counties have to file a cultural competence plan. The federal government has a set of rules that looks at proposals;

research proposals to be funded must meet the criteria of cultural competence. It's rare now to find an institution that will not include the word cultural competence in its mission statement or objectives.

That's the good news. Virtually everyone, every institution, will include cultural competence in its mission or goals. The problem has been that for some, that's where it stops; they put it into a mission statement, they put the words in there, but they don't do anything beyond that. The second thing that has happened is that institutions, whether we're talking about educational institutions, agencies, or otherwise, because of these expectations to demonstrate cultural competency, will often have training workshops for their providers, to train their providers to be culturally competent. But that's also where it stops. My definition of cultural competence, and one that is fairly common, is that cultural competence doesn't simply rest with the individual provider or staff; it should be part of a system. Using a systems approach essentially involves looking not only at the person delivering the service, but also looking at the policies, looking at the governance, looking at the consumers; in other words, at all those different levels. The provider may be very culturally competent, they may be sensitive to culture, but if the family comes into the agency and feels very alienated from the environment is, or if they cannot bring their children to the waiting room or are told leave their kids at home, then the system may not be providing culturally competent service. That's important because in some cultures, parents expect to take their kids with them to an appointment; if there are no accommodations for children or for language, then it's not really a competent service. Then again, it's also very common to look at cultural competence simply in terms of language, especially if are working with immigrants who are perceived as needing culturally responsive services; it is common to assume that once you've provided interpreter services or services in the client's language, you're done. However, you have to go beyond that because someone from the same culture can also be very insensitive. Essentially we have a service delivery system that commonly ignores culture as a variable. Typically when you go to a doctor, you don't think of bringing your culture along because most people don't think or expect their doctor to pay attention to that; most people leave their culture at the door. For example, with medication, clients from different ethnic groups have differential responses to medication dosages; client cultural beliefs affect medical compliance. Essentially you don't leave culture at the door; but clients and providers on both sides commonly believe you do. I think what needs to occur is more attention to those variables which make a system more culturally responsive at all levels, and not simply expecting it of providers. This includes looking at all the policies, looking at the governance, and affecting change throughout the system.

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AR – Yeah, yeah, I couldn't agree more. Part of the reason I asked you that question is that I'm a clinician as well as a historian, and the program I went through did exactly what you said; they put the right language in the materials they had to present for accreditation purposes, and that's as far as it went.

JLC – Right.

AR – And I went through my whole training, and this is in one of the most culturally diverse cities in the world, without getting anything in terms of formal training in cultural competency. That word was definitely out there, so that's kind of part of the reason I asked, and it's interesting to hear you say this is what needs to happen next.

JLC – Right.

AR – Do you think the receptivity, on all levels, at a deep level, to the idea and practice of cultural competency has been any different in counselling programs, or in professional programs, versus say the standard scientist-practitioner, clinical, kind of degree?

JLC - Actually I'm not sure I have an opinion about that; as to whether or not there's a difference. I think, as a whole, I've seen an evolution that's been positive. But I think some programs care more for overt appearances, and believe that cultural competence is not as important. There are also some who would believe that statistics doesn't have anything to do with cultural competence; but in fact it does. The kind of research methods that are chosen, the kinds of statistical analysis, the kinds of design of studies, the whole issue of randomized controlled studies are all related to cultural competence. Take the notion that you must have a control group, for example; studies on ethnic minority groups are generally expected to have whites as a control group. When we study whites, however, we don't expect that researchers must have a black group, or a Hispanic group. This bias in our thinking is indigenous to our way of thinking about research, about practice from a white or ethnocentric perspective. I also think that the further a researcher or provider is removed from direct person contact, the greater the belief that cultural competence is not as important; that's true in medicine as well. Whereas your primary care physicians, who are dealing with the people directly, are more likely to see the need for cultural competence, your radiologists and specialists who have less direct contact with patients generally believe it's not important anymore; and that's not true.

AR – Right, right. What advice would you have, at this point in your career, and your wisdom, what advice would you have for an Asian American feminist woman coming into psychology?

JLC – I think this go back to what I was saying before about identity; the ability to be comfortable with knowing who you are will go a long way towards being able to deal with stereotypic expectations people will have of you. Secondly, it is important to recognize that people will have impressions of you whether you like it or not; they may or may not be accurate; one must be able to learn how to deal with them from a position of strength. The third issue is one of mentorship; there are now more Asian American women, and Asian American professionals around; being able to find a critical mass and supportive network is important and is possible now. Building these networks will help you realize that you're not the only one, and that there are safe havens in which you can bounce ideas and reality test distortions received from others.

{1:01:55}

AR – Right. Can I ask you to talk about, I mean taking it to even more of a personal level, you said that when people see your name they pick you out of the crowd because they think, 'Oh, well Chin, that's Asian American,' and they look at you. That of course can result then in certain stereotypes and discrimination and I think it's important for the historical record, for that to be acknowledged and also then to understand how people have dealt with that. Can you think of any times, and I'm thinking specific examples, where being Asian American has resulted in discrimination?

JLC – Well there's two things. One is that there are definitely many times where being Asian American has resulted in discrimination; but there are also many more times in which you don't know if it has because it's been covert. A lot of Dovidio's work has demonstrated this; you may get a comment about something, and it will not reference your race or ethnicity; but you have to question why did you get that comment, or why did that happen; would someone who was not a person of color get that? Essentially, there's nothing you can prove; but that's why I get back to my earlier comment about the importance of having the confidence and strength of one's identity; the challenge will often be to one's competence. Therefore, to be comfortable and confident enough to realize that sometimes the challenge may be because of your race or ethnicity. Certainly it's a fine line because if it should not prevent you from dealing with appropriate criticism. Being able to recognize and figure out when these challenges to your competency are not because of your competency, but because of covert discrimination is a challenge in itself since it may not even be recognized by the person saying or doing those kinds of things.

AR – Okay. Is there anything I haven't asked about that you feel would be important to speak about or contribute on video tape, either about your experiences as an Asian American woman in psychology?

JLC – Yeah, one of the things I would like to put on tape is about my mother and my book, *Learning from My Mother's Voice* which honours my mother and highlights the contrasts of culture. The contrast in terms of education and the many "contrasts," quote, between my mother and myself as an immigrant woman vs. a second and third generation woman were many. But the book demonstrated how very important it was that despite these differences and contrasts, how much I had learned from my mother; how she was helpful to me in the formation of me as a professional woman even though my mother was not a professional woman; and how important she was to me in terms of my identity as a female, because my mother would tell me things like 'Get an education because then you'll never have to depend on a man.' This advice was especially important because, within traditional Asian culture, all women were dependent on their husbands; this was a very strong statement for her to be making to me. These were words that I put in the book--of what I learned from my mother, how important it was to keep the wisdom of her words with me as a professional woman, and though the contrasts between us were so very different, how we shared so much together.

AR – That's a good place to end I think.