

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Lillian Comas-Díaz

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford and Wade Pickren
Washington, DC
January 6, 2006*

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A: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

W: Wade Pickren, Interviewer

L: Lillian Comas-Díaz, Interview Participant

W: So much of your work has been at the intersection of diversity, and really the role of diversity being both gender, and being a person of color, and feminism, and where these things intersect. I'd like you to talk a little bit about how that came to be. I know there's only a thousand strands to it, but even if you can't talk about all thousand strands, talk about how that came to be woven together this way in your life.

L: I think the story of my life is the story of the convergence of gender, ethnicity, culture, color, language, physical ability, geopolitics and politics. So, in a way it's like - hmm, there's a concept in Latin America, it's an artistic concept called arpillera, which is where people who have felt oppressed create their story by growing images or putting a collage, or weaving, essentially a weaving of different trends in life and then they create their story. But they do it in a way that the oppressor cannot understand it. So, they can communicate and it becomes empowering, it becomes healing, and it becomes subversive as well - people speaking their truth in a way that if you're not allowed to say it in an official way, you find ways through art, through other means of affirmation. So for me, the combination of all of these diversities, it's like an arpillera in my life, and as a psychologist, I try to find what is the arpillera in people's lives. So, I guess that's the way of describing it.

W: You were born in Chicago you said, and you spent a good part of your early life in Puerto Rico. Can you talk about how that was formative for you?

L: Well as a Puerto Rican, my story is the reverse of many Puerto Ricans in that the history of the migration of Puerto Ricans to the United States is that many Puerto Ricans are born in Puerto Rico and then we migrate to the United States in search of - fill in the blank. I was born in Chicago, Illinois because my parents migrated because they needed to eat, basically. And we went back when I was about 6 and I stayed in the island until about 20, 21, 22, so a lot of my formative years obviously are in Puerto Rico - schooling, undergraduate, worldview, and again, I feel like that experience was crucial to me because it's not only being a woman of intersections, Chicago, Puerto Rico, but also Puerto Rico is by itself an intersection, being North American, being South American, being American, being Latin American, being Caribbean, and also in the racial

composition, in the ethnic composition. So intersections, now that I'm describing this to you, [intersections] are the key element in my life.

W: So your life has been lived in many ways in points of intersection, where different strands of culture, politics, probably religion, race have come together like that.

L: Yes yes, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

W: Growing up in Puerto Rico, growing up in this time period, how did your interest in psychology evolve?

L: Many times I, when I asked myself why did I become a psychologist, the inner voice says that I became a psychologist before I was born. What I mean by that is that I come from a family, a culture that has a tradition of healers and my two grandmothers were healers in the folk healing tradition. My great-grandmothers were healers. My mother was a nurse. So each generation adapts the healer role into what is needed at that time. And part of my experience, the culture shock that I went through moving from Chicago, frigid Chicago, to Puerto Rico, was that I went to the island after there was a major hurricane and I went into the school, being you know, being the new kid on the block and people were dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder because the storm actually entered through the town that my parents, that my mother is from. So the school was sort of like a disaster area. So what happens is that I become the listener and the kids would come to me and they would talk, because I had not experienced the hurricane. So then the teachers identified that and said, "Go and talk to Lillian."

So, I guess that was my first official psychological role. So basically, when I would go back home they would say, "Oh yah, you are doing what your grandmother did and what your great grandmother did," so I said all right. And being a psychologist - where did that come from? I was born with a cleft palate and was very very lucky because being born in Chicago, my parents, because my mother was a nurse, they negotiated an experimental operation at the University of Illinois, and it worked. And I went recently, I went to the Mayo clinic to do some kind of testing and one of the experts in the world on cleft palate, she said to me, "I don't know how they did it, because 1950, 1954, we had no idea!" So, I said well, I should be, namaste?, you know! Anyway, so the story is that because of the cleft palate and all that comes, the sequela of you know how to learn to speak. I didn't learn to speak like you hear me now until I was about 18 and so that made me a really good listener, you know. So, I guess everything helps you to be where you are right now.

W: Good.

A: So you were drawn to psychology as a way to be sort of a professional healer in a way. And how did your family react to your decisions, or what was their role in supporting your decisions in terms of your career?

L: Ok, that's, well, hmm. Again, the teachers - I was blessed to really have wonderful teachers - I went to public school in really really tiny Puerto Rico but I don't know how, I'm lucky. I'm a lucky woman! I had wonderful teachers, and they said you know, you sound like a psychologist, and then I went home and I was like "I want to be a psychologist", and my parents said that's wonderful! Great! Yah yah, what the heck is a psychologist? I didn't know what a psychologist was! I got a lot of support from my family.

In fact this is a very interesting point in terms of my being a feminist, because I always call myself a feminist of color, because as a feminist of color, we are so used to contradictions and paradoxes and different ways of empowering yourself. Surviving and thriving in multiple realities and in environments that could be hostile to you, you have to learn how to deal with it. So why am I saying that? Because growing up in a very traditional family in terms of the gender roles, my mother was very assertive at work but she was very unassertive at home, and my father was a very traditional macho Latino. And you know the whole thing - he was disappointed because I was the first child and I was not a male. He let me know that! But, here is where the contradiction comes - every time I would say I want to be a psychologist, my father would say, you can be president of the United States, remember you were born in Chicago Illinois! You can be president, so whatever you want to do, you are doing! So, the things, I mean, in growing up with those kinds of mixed messages, which is really part of everything you are surrounded, like religion, like growing up Roman Catholic, and then you hear about Mrs. Dona Blanca who is this healer who works with the spirits or she works with the African deities... synchronism, synchronism! Or you have you know, the statue of the virgin but that is the black Madonna, we have one, Virgen Negra, that we knew that she is the black goddess from way way way back. So synchronism is part of my intersections - how you learn to live with these kinds of influences, and so by making sense, and if they don't make sense, that's fine too, they don't necessarily have to make sense.

W: Well, it seems to me by listening to you today and reading through your material, your life experiences seem to have been almost, ideally suited to kind of prepare you to be a person in a globalizing world that can make a difference. In drawing from a lot of traditions, you have this kind of family tradition of folk healing that has been now transformed in some ways into a professional healing ... and yet you haven't forsaken, ignored this kind of folk tradition that you are a part of as well and folk... I want to come back that, we both have some curiosity and interest in that pluralist idea that you are talking about. But for now, I would like to ask, in one of your autobiographical statements you said that you were in college right in the time that the independence movement was very strong in Puerto Rico. And I know that's a continuing force in Puerto Rico, I know there is still discontent among many citizens there. And you have written about coming to an ethno-political approach in your work. Can you talk about some of the role of that and how psychology was part of that? Or did it inhibit you in some ways? Positives and negatives that there were in there?

L: So let me start explaining then, because, because it's sort of like a major line in my life, being raised, being a Puerto Rican and being raised in Puerto Rico and Puerto Rico is

technically, officially a commonwealth of the United States and that is basically a colony. It has been identified by the United Nations as a classic example of the colony and when I was at the university in the mid- to late sixties, it was at the height of the independence movement which is the movement towards keeping Puerto Rico independent of the United States. So, that was an incredible experience of being part of that movement. Umm, I'm going to say something that I know you are going to edit it out. I was so involved in this movement that when I applied to a White House Fellowship and I went through the whole thing and I was one of the finalists and what have you, I was not given, and then I found out that I have a record - all Puerto Ricans of my age who went to the university ... we all have a record, it's not a record, how you call that?

W: FBI File?

L: Yah thank you, thank you! Because I was part of this movement and many of my friends were really you know, very very involved, people who were in Cuba and in Russia you know the whole gamut, so you know, anyways - maybe it was good that I didn't go to the White House. So at that point, of course, I started to look into psychology - what can psychology contribute or inhibit into this process. And in Puerto Rico, at least at that time, psychology was taught from a very systemic perspective because you have to be, given that the society is collectivistic. And that was wonderful because it helped me understand, again intersectional systems, however, I found that the movement, even though it was very, it was promoting independence and liberation, it was not that gender egalitarian. And also, racially, it was not racially affirmative and that's a whole Pandora's box about the racial situation in Puerto Rico. It was very class oriented and very politically oriented, but it was missing the gender and the openness to other perspectives. In a way even though it was liberating it was also rigid.

A: Did you have any personal experiences where that became very clear to you that that were some problems there?

L: Sure sure. A lot of my friends- some of them were women and they were very capable in the movement- but they were not promoted at all. They were not seen, they were great, they were given tasks to sort of support but they were not given leadership tasks. But I would voice that a lot, but you know, I was not heard. Umm, also racially, there was an issue there. In terms of - see, in the Caribbean, race and class are very much connected, in fact they are one. Even though there was a movement to liberate the classes racially, there was not an awareness, that's again my personal experience, other people may disagree. So what I did is, I tried to use psychology as a paradigm to understand all these contradictions and what I did was I looked outside. Because again I had to get mentored, because being a woman at the intersection, I could not feel this particular group will explain for me all of these phenomena, so I need to look at different areas. So I found psychology of liberation, psychology of oppression, psychology of the colonized and these were people who were African descent in the Caribbean who were trained in Western ways, they were psychiatrists and I started to read them. Fanon, Albert Memmi, all in the '60s and that really saved me umm conceptually, because it gave me another paradigm to understand and to not to take it personally - because you know, the

rejections, because what happened to me also was there was another division in Puerto Rico, which is an interpretation of the internalization of colonization and the division is “Puerto Ricans born from the island” and “Puerto Ricans born from the mainland,” and because I was quote - born in the United States, then I was suspicious to the real Puerto Ricans. So no matter where I will go, it was like wow, I better look at this from a different perspective. So the psychology of the oppressed or the psychology of colonization, psychology of the colonized gave me a lens to understand that, and again to be able to transcend the wounded, the woundedness. Because you know, we have a saying in Puerto Rico, it sounds like something like, “The worst knife is the one that is made by your own tree...” so I mean it really really hurt on how to contend with all of that. So that was very affirmative and I could bring it under the axis of psychology and again, psychology for me represented a combination of science, art, and some aspects of spirituality which I didn’t know what to call it. So, that’s why psychology was a field that you could continue to expand, even though it’s very rigid, at least you could push it and it would accommodate adaptations and it can turn into something else.

W: You were coming of age if you will at college right around the time, what people usually refer to as the second wave of feminism. Were you affected by some of that writing and that work?

L: Yes of course, of course, I was reading a lot of that stuff in Puerto Rico, and again I was reading it in secret, why? Because if you are reading English, you’re very suspicious, you have to read in Spanish! Anyway, but I just wanted to take that opportunity to explain why many of these perspectives, you have to keep it to yourself, or you talk to people who could understand your way of thinking, yes, of course, but again, I had to take everything with a grain of salt, because historically, the white feminism has been very good for white women. And women of color, particularly African Americans, historically, when they have supported feminism and they wait their turn, historically white women do not support women of color. And having said that, I don’t throw out the baby with the bathwater, again because feminism is reflective and it’s a part of our consciousness and that’s where people - like feminist women of color - come in because we are helping that process.

W: I’d like to follow up on that. A few years ago, I guess, five or six years ago, ahh, a book came out, by Chela Sandoval, called *Methodology of the Oppressed*. In that book she writes, she calls it U.S third world feminism - and she argues in that book, if I’ve understood her correctly, that women of color bring to feminism the strategies of an oppressed people, that is, the strategies of adaptation, of learning how to work from the margins, and it sounds, like when I hear you talking, this is the very thing that you are doing.

L: Yes, yes absolutely! This is a well-known fact that because you are in the margins, we people of color, we get into a discipline, or a group, and we bring all the strategies of what is called cultural resilience. Which means you know, not only adapting, but also resisting. When you have to - fighting, or not fighting, it’s changing, transforming the reality in a way - and we have millenniums of years of doing that. But oppression gives

you a different vista, gives you different eyes. Oppression teaches you to see the connection of different systems, gender, class. Oppression teaches you that your personal survival is not only important to the survival of the community, of the group, it's important because you are just one drop of water in the sea. And I think that's very important, the whole collectivistic approach, because here in the States we are so individualistic - and that has its place, but when you are dealing with changing a system or fighting oppression, an army of one does not necessary do it! Yah.

A: Let me backtrack a little bit more, just to elaborate on this. You've been, in addition to your research and your practice, you've been really involved in organized psychology through APA, really involved in feminist organizations, through CWP, so I wondered if you would be able to talk more about some of your experiences as a feminist of color in terms of how did you get involved in these groups? How receptive were they to you and to your perspectives as a feminist of color? How did you get involved in organized feminist psychology vis à vis CWP or APA?

L: Sure sure, let me start by saying that by being a person of color, being a woman of color, and being a person from a third world country, I am born a political animal. And politics have been so important in my life, not because I have been in politics, but because I see how politics affects - they are so pervasive. So when I came back to the United States, I started to get involved in organizations that promoted the rights of the umm, of the mentally ill people, umm, the community organizations. For me it was a given, it was part of what you do as a professional. So that way I learned about the organizations here in the States, because they are very different than other places. So when I came to Washington to actually work at APA, umm, as the director of the Office of Ethnic Minorities, it was also an immersion in a different kind of politics, APA politics, ok? It was like anything else - I learned the language, I learned the rules, I learned everything and I became very much - I saw that women's issues, international issues, ethnic minority issues (this is in the '80s), go hand in hand. Public interest issues, go hand in hand, gay and lesbian issues go hand in hand. I just could not understand the division - again, because I point out the intersections, to me they were obvious. But so, I become very much involved in those groups. And again, because of being oppressed, it's not that this is a fatalistic construct, I sort of like understand opposition and resistance to a change in the status quo, and for me that's a given. So when I go in, I try to strategize knowing that whatever I do, or say, if it's going to upset the worldview or the way we do things, they are going to reject it. So I have to find a way - I have to translate. There's another concept in my life, translation. One of those translated women in the process of translating all the time! And as a therapist that's very helpful. Anyway - politics, organization and APA. So, strategizing how to do that was very helpful, finding allies, people who also, who are not going to be in the same situation you are because you are always going to be like, the lone ranger you know, finding people whose life experiences are like, I'm very much into biography, I like to know people, because their biography tells me so much... for instance when I was doing my PhD at U Mass [University of Massachusetts], I found out that this - and I'm not going to mention names, ok - this professor, was living close to Toronto and she was commuting for her personal life, she was married to someone. So I said that this woman has been exposed to Canada, she's

American, she knows the other perspective, so, I became, I befriended her - and I was right. And people were saying to the other minorities, how are you, what is the connection here? I don't get it.. and I said, points of convergence. Use the language that she is familiar with. What happens to you as an American when you go to Canada? What happens to you when you go to Montreal and you don't speak French? So always, that kind of strategy, getting allies, developing a constituency.

A: And how was that process?

L: Well, I'm going to be very honest with you, many times it was not easy. But, thinking of a goal that goes beyond you helps, because I see - as a chain, you know, I'm just one that is part of the link. I'm one link, and that helps me. And my brother is a another link, and I visualize myself passing the torch you know, because I know it's going to be just for one period of time. I'm going to pass the torch and we are going to move forward and then I can rest and do other things and then move on. So I use whatever image at that stage of my life makes sense, because otherwise, it's very draining and umm, for instance, there was a division which I'm not going to mention the name, in psychology where a group of us, psychologists of color were trying to develop a committee on diversity. We were working and working and working and then we happened to see the president of that division going into an elevator. And I went there and I said, "Can I count on you? And this and this and that, so that we can have a voice?" And he said to me "NO". So I said, "I'm sorry, I didn't hear you, I figured my English is failing here, and he said NO. And I said why not? And he said, "Because I don't want to!" But luckily for him, the elevator door closed because I was like wha!! So another colleague, an African-American psychologist and I said, did you hear what I heard and he said yah, and I said, and this is the kind of experience that - and this is someone that in the meeting was very pro-diversity and you know, is kind of, so this kind of situation where you have to talk to other colleagues and develop strategies and just continuing - one of the things that I'm very happy to say that is happening now is that the dots are being connected. At this moment I'm a member of CIRP [Committee on International Relations in Psychology] for the second time and I'm just ecstatic to see how people are saying, you know, international issues and ethnic minority people of color issues, are just coming together, I mean I didn't think I was going to see it at this stage, but it's just fine. These are the kinds of rewards that make you keep on going, because otherwise, you know, you better just close the shop and do something else, you know. Did I answer your question?

W: I'm gong to follow up since you are here right at that place when you were here at APA at the office of minority affairs. It was right at the time that division 45 was being formed and I'd like...

L: Yah we better talk about 45... (laughs)

W: Division 45, what were some of the issues, I mean, the whole conference was in the '70s and ethnic minority affairs was established. You must have been the second or third person to ...

L: The second yes.

W: What were some of the issues, the politics that went along with forming division 45?

L: Well I came to Washington, to APA, basically in 1984 and at that time I was the director of Ethnic Minority at first and working with the task force on communication with the minority constituencies. And that task force, the unofficial liaison, was to work in the creation of the society of ethnic minorities. And I say unofficial because umm, an APA group could not work towards the creation of another division you know, and also at that time there was a moratorium against creating new divisions, for whatever reasons. So we were working hard and were energized by the establishment of the office of ethnic minorities at first, energized by a lot of allies saying that this is the time to have this division. And even though we had a lot of support, we barely made the number of signatures. But we were not deterred at all. The division was approved by the council of representatives and Esteban Olmedo who was the first director of the ethnic minorities office became the entering president, Melba Vasquez was the council representative, I was the treasurer and John Moritsugu was the secretary. And then we had the elections and then we had a full board and something very interesting happened in those elections that for me, at that moment, I saw it as a wonderful metaphor of the division. And that is, the president was a tie. And there was a man and a woman, and we went back again and again there was a tie! So, Chalsa Loo and John Moritsugu said "Why don't we have a co-presidency model?" OH! "Well, Lillian what do you think?" I was the secretary treasurer you know, they liked how I did the numbers, "Lillian what do you think of the numbers?" - Forget about the numbers, this is the historically significant, let's go with it! We'll work it out. We'll work it out. And we did work it out! That group really, we hardly had anything, and what it did was it created the base of the community that in terms of the strategies, that uses resources appropriately. Coming out of the historical operation and financial operation, we had to do what we had to do.

So, those beginnings of the division were actually abundance. Again, going back to the paradox because we became so rich in so many different ways. It was, when I think about it I think about crying because it was such a beautiful image for us to say, "From nothing we are going to create everything" and that is really the spirit of the group. I remember in my first mid-winter meeting saying, "How are we going to do this without any money?!" You know, let's go back to school, let's have roommates, you know stuff like that...so that became somehow a kind of guiding principle - when we are being told 'no' we are going to say 'yes,' we are going to do it, it's important. And we applied that principle to the journal - which is something that I feel umm, humbled and very proud of because it's a coincidence, it's just a coincidence. I happened to be at APA when the society was established and I became part of that group and then when the division, the society, was ready for its official journal, I happened to have been the editor-in-chief of a journal called *Cultural Diversity and Mental Health*. And that became a journal that the division, the society said, you know the kind of journal that we want is already out there. So I became a broker with the publishers and the publishers could have sold that to our

division! I'm not going to tell you the details because I was asked by the publisher not to tell, so we got the journal. And the journal is doing beautifully!

W: What inspired you to start the journal to begin with?

L: Well as a person who could not speak for many many many years, and as a person who has been absolutely fascinated by words and language - I always read and I love to write stories - I was very interested in writing all my life. So I'm very, I pay a lot of homage and respect to the oral and to the written word. And I felt that the division had a rich oral history but what it was lacking was the written word. And umm, I'd say to psychologists of color, friends and colleagues of mine, Janis Sanchez as I said, "We better write before we are written off." So that's how I began to be interested in creating a journal for culture and diversity issues. And at that time psychology was not too interested in doing this, so I went outside. I went into psychiatry, social work and ahh, psychology...I was working with an organization, American Orthopsychiatric Association - which is interdisciplinary. I was working with them for many many years and, also because before coming here, I was in the psychiatry department at Yale University in New Haven so I had that discipline. And I've always been very interdisciplinary-oriented. You know because, issues of people of color, issues of women of color, you have to be interdisciplinary-oriented. And I don't mean mental health only, of course, anthropology, sociology, you name it, everything! So that's how I got interested and I was fortunate enough that I approached publishers and we came up with the idea and I had many of the people from Division 45 become members of the editorial board which also was significant - because I remember in the discussions about should we create a brand new journal or so should we go with this publisher, or should we adopt this journal that's already there, one of the things that people said was, "You know, this journal that Lillian is editing is our journal, look at the people who are in the editorial board!" So, synchronicity, synchronicity, so they asked me to stay. I was ready to sort of move on and I stayed on until the transition was completed from being editor and then Gail Wyatt came in and she took that journal and she just flew with that journal, Gail Wyatt and now Gordon Nayama Hall has just taken that journal to the top potential. I mean he, I am just delighted in how the division and the journal as the child of the division are doing.

In terms of trying to remember some of the questions asked, and questions that I have asked myself about the first twenty years of the division, in an article that my colleagues asked me to reminisce about the beginnings of the division and one of the questions is "What do I see that we have not accomplished?" To begin with let me start by saying that we have accomplished so much! In spite of - and that's culture resilience and it's very important. One of the challenges that we still have is to start to integrate and infuse our wisdom, our way of seeing reality - either our methodology, our research, our ways of healing, synchronize it into mainstream psychology. That's something that we need to do. Of course we are dealing with developmental issues, umm, at this point we have to, as people of color, we have to learn our language and the mainstream language before we create a transculturation that is the creation of a new culture. And from that point of view, I think of Division 45 as gaining force in the transformation of psychology.

A: Where do you see... continuing on your very sort of positive spirit, where do you see the openings in mainstream psychology to that incursion? What do you see as your best hope for making those incursions?

End of Side A

Beginning of Side B

A:... see the world in different ways, where do you see the openings? I was going to ask you about the obstacles, but I'm going to ask you about the openings instead!

L: Absolutely! I think we are talking about two sides of the same coin. Because one of the strategies we have learned, some people have learned as people of color, is that when you see the obstacles, you see the door that's closing, there's another door. Actually there are 100 doors that are opening when this door closes! And umm, in my experience, what I'm seeing is, the general public is creating that opening because people are talking about diversity, people are talking about women's issues, I mean psychology is actually in danger of being a dinosaur when you compare us with any other, and we proclaim that we are the vanguard of well-being, you know, and in many ways we are really dinosaurs! I think the pressure of the general public, the journals that write about it, the people putting pressure on the government, the media. One of the things I've done in my career is that I've always gotten the power of media. And I'm one of the media psychologists so I do a lot of media in Spanish, because my idea is to convey the message to people who cannot reach it. So because of that I've been able to get exposed to a lot of the media and the media people have their finger on the pulse of the world and I see that opening coming from the general public basically. The issue of transformation, you know, the NIH [National Institutes of Health] has a whole institute of alternative medicine that didn't come from the physicians, that came from the public putting pressure on the legislators who then say we are going to give "x" amount of millions of dollars and here we are. So I am very hopeful that if psychology is interested in surviving, it's going to have to listen to that pressure.

W: I know that you have to go to another appointment and we don't have time to cover all of the things that are of interest and importance here, but I do want to come back to something you said just a few moments ago. That is that you are at a point now where you see dots being connected that the pressure within the United States to make psychology more inclusive - which I know has been a struggle, it hasn't been a series of triumphs, it's been a long struggle with some triumphs - but now what you are also seeing is a rise of psychology in other places sometimes referred to as indigenous psychology. I wonder if you would reflect for a moment on something that I've thought about quite a bit and started writing about and that is that in the United States, and perhaps in North America, that it's been a series of changes in both the Association of Black Psychology in the late 1960s, and then there is Asian American, the first, as it was called then, as the Nixon administration called, the Hispanic movement within psychology, which was a very small group, how the changes that have been evoked by that - would you reflect on

the role that that has played in making, at least creating a possibility for North American psychology to really map on to or correspond to psychology as it's finding expression in other cultures?

L: Absolutely. We are talking about the influence of psychologists of color, American psychologists of color, and how that will affect psychology to become more inclusive and I would say more ???, and that's where the connection with the psychology of people of color and international aspects of psychology come into place because many, let's say many of the Latino psychologists are saying you know, we have had this rich history of professional scientific psychology in Latin America that is being complimented in the United States. The United States is very ethnocentric in that sense, has been historically, and politically. I understand why it happened there, isolation, we are not going to deal with the war in Europe or do we really have to?

But that really through the years has been hindering of America, of Americans. So, you have that push from the Latino psychologists, you have it from the Asian psychologists, the world of indigenous wisdom, for instance, not only, the psychological therapist has knowledge, but, Buddhism, Hinduism, I mean all of this that we are seeing right now that is being infused into psychological treatment, you know, it's a synchronism. I think that the American psychologists of color, not only in the process of their, our racial ethnic, cultural identity development individually, but collectively, we're looking back at who we were and who we are and we are saying you know, "I can't offer this, I come here and I don't have to burn my bridges. I can go back and forth, metaphorically." And why not? This is the place to do it. So, what I'm saying is that the more cultures that are created and the more we as a culture are being affected by international issues, i.e. 9/11, we can't then afford to be ethnocentric anymore. It may take some time and it's out of conflict, but you know, for instance, right now with this whole issue of terrorism, psychologists of color have the expertise in terms of life experiences and psychological experiences to provide help to the United States, to mainstream psychology. And in fact when we are doing in psychology the role of resilience - a group of psychologists of color we got together and we proposed the role of resilience to people of color perspective. And that's part of APA, former documents. So, I am hopeful. I think it's going to take more conflict, unfortunately, but when there is a birth there is pain.

W: Your own experiences, what is really impressive, really strikes me here, is that your own traditional culture of really being raised in a family of healers. From your mother's side and your father's side, your role in that, how much do you draw on that, either consciously or unconsciously in your own life and work? I mean in your therapy work but also in your life, in your professional life?

L: Yah yah. Well, the way I see it is that this healing is like a cultural osmosis. I grew up with that. And so it's something that I will stop to think about it, or, I don't stop and say oh I'm in my office, or I'm using it only here, of course it makes it easier when you are in the office because you are focused and your attention is so keen. Then you resort to that quite easily. But this is so much part of who I am. For instance in my organization work, I used a lot of these gifts. Intuition, how to read people. What to say, what not to say,

when to say, when not to say it. You just have to. It's another way of looking at reality and in a way, I'm sorry with the expression, but going with the flow. Not your flow obviously, but the flow of what needs to be done. It's interesting this question, because at this stage in my life I'm actually trying to understand it rationally. I sort of did that, conceptually I did some writing on how, a long time ago, in the early '80s on how to use Puerto Rican espiritismo in psychotherapy and I did some research and I found a lot of similarities in that kind of thing, but my question goes deeper. It has to do with the meaning of what I'm doing and how it connects with other people and other issues. My guess is it's a more epistemological question for me at this point. So, it's always there and the difference, the decision milestone for me was when I gave myself permission to own it. To recognize it and to honor it. Before I was like, "Oh I'm a scientist, I'm this, I'm that." Uh-huh- that's part of my past, but it - and of course it was saving my life, it was doing all kinds of major decisions in my life, I have made many because of intuition - but no no no, I'm a psychologist, I don't live there. Until finally, you know, because of clients, patients, I said you know, this is it, let me just own it!

W: Thank you for taking the time with us, it's been wonderful.

L: Thank you both of you for this experience to reflect. I hope I didn't sound like I was going all over the place.

A: No not at all.

W: There is so much.

A: It's hard to stop almost.