Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Maria Root

Interviewed by Wade Pickren
Seattle, WA
January 26, 2007

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MR – Maria Root, Interview Participant
WP – Wade Pickren, Interviewer

MR – Maria Primitiva Paz Root. I was born in Manila, Philippines, September 13, 1955.

WP – Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit about your upbringing in Manila, and if you will, kind of trace that route of how that is connected to you entering the field of psychology.

MR – Sure. I don't know how well I'll trace that. I came to the US [United States] very young, as a young child. And part of the history during that time, there was the Barred Zone Act, which basically had very minimal quotas for people who were from brown countries. My mother and I had to enter through a circuitous route; so we entered through British Honduras, and then Guatemala, and then up to the US. My father is an only child and he was cut off from his family somewhat for marrying my mother. So the family that I really grew up in (and had really the cousins and the family, big family get-togethers) was my mother's side of the family. She had two brothers here and a first cousin, and then [*other*] brothers and sisters remained in the Philippines. So I had a set of cousins here in the US. We grew up starting, actually fairly poor, meaning not enough food for everyone, and then eventually that changed. And being of Filipino background, my parents did things to make sure that I could go to Catholic school. And I think that's where the first piece of psychology starts.

The jokes about being a good Catholic is how you really internalize all the guilt. So I guess I had done a very good job of that and by the third grade the nuns recommended that my parents take me to a psychologist. I really am not sure why, but it had something to do with guilt. So they brought me to a psychologist, and that would have been early '60s. And my parents really wouldn't have been very familiar with a psychologist, so it was actually really remarkable that they were willing to do that. That's a concept that at that time, and even up until recent years, just in terms of clinical psychologists, counselling psychologists, it's not a concept that makes sense. So the psychologist recommended to them that they take me out of Catholic school and put me into public school. So in the middle of the first semester of third grade I was transferred to public school, which was sort of next door to the Catholic school. But that was my first contact with psychology, and I know that it did have some impression in terms of the kinds of questions that this woman asked. And I don't remember it being a very long interview, but she obviously drew some conclusions pretty quickly, and before

I knew it I was out of Catholic school. I think the next – you know, there are two routes I think of when I think of what shaped psychology. One would be just the growing up experiences through the schools and some of the family socialization and explanation of what was happening. And then ending up in a school that was actually a, primarily a pre-med school, although that was never my intention. So I'll trace those two routes.

{4:00}

Growing up when I did, people didn't know what Filipinos where. We'd live in immigrant neighbourhoods and we would be called all the derogatory names of all the ethnic and racial groups. And I would go in, I would know that there was something negative about this, you know at five years of age, at six years of age, and so I would ask my mother what does that mean? Well she was also getting familiar with some of the terms used in the US. So very early on there was this education taking place about the valence of if you're called anything with intensity, it's probably a bad name. And there was also a class association with that. Where I'm very fortunate in the family, on the Filipino side of the family, is that it was a very political family. One of my great uncles started the first union for the telephone company in the Philippines, and I can cite different political leanings, but my mother would really do the decolonization talk, and to the extreme of how everything brown was good and better than what was white. But that actually was really quite wonderful and I would go and tell my father who is white that really certain things that are Filipino, or whatever, are better than American, or certain ways of expressing things are better. And he would, I could tell that he would be caught in a dilemma because he would (now I think looking back) see that that was sort of an extreme statement, but if he said, "Oh no, it's not that way," it would sort of feed into kind of the larger social view that Filipinos weren't good enough.

Being the oldest child (I have two younger brothers), being born in the Philippines, also carries a legacy with it in that first children of immigrant parents are oftentimes sort of the culture brokers and liaisons. And particularly coming out of the Korean War era, there are many of us with White American fathers, or Black American fathers, and Japanese or Filipino mothers. And that the kids acculturated and then would sort of try to help the mothers understand, kind of interpret the social system. So it was interesting that as I would interpret some of the social system my mother would be very aware too of the sexist stuff, definitely the racial and ethnic stuff, the language stuff. And so she would be socializing me to kind of deconstruct at a very early age. I mean as soon as I can remember being in school I would be trying to socialize her as to how to be more American. And some of that was infused already with an internalized oppressive attitude.

I happened to grow up with a pretty non-conventional Filipino mother, which has figured very much I think into how I have been able to shape some of my discourse around what I do. My mother went back to school. My mother had a degree in chemistry from the Philippines. In the Philippines education is very highly valued and

even at my mother's time, if there was money in the family, the women were also...it was important for the women to go to school if at all possible. So very educated, very intelligent family. In contrast, my father was the first person to finish high school in his family and then get a college degree. I remember attending his graduation and I typed his Master's thesis, I think, when I was in the tenth grade. It was an engineering thesis, so lots of numbers and symbols. So there's just this contrast that goes on and on.

{8:30}

And so I'm going through the public schools and I have teachers from very early on with impressions – and it's funny how mixed people look different at different ages – so when I was very young, living in LA, I looked very brown. I would have teachers, even initially in Catholic school, really already stereotyping and I would have to work harder to prove myself. I remember doing a first grade project and it was for the whole school open house and there was a complaint lodged that I couldn't possibly have done the project; I couldn't possibly have done the pen and ink printing at a first grade level. I would think that too maybe of a first grader, but I am very artistic and it showed up very early. But there would be parents complaining, there would be teachers questioning if I could possibly have done the homework, possibly have written whatever. So that all just goes on a daily, daily, daily basis, to the point of even dating. I mean there was nobody I could date that would be right for some of the teachers. And my parents, I have no complaints about them that way, but there were just a lot of things even in dating experiences that started to be very informative racially.

My mother went back to school and she got a degree in psychology. So while she was going to school I would have been in late grade school when she was redoing her degree. She's a pretty intense person that jumps in and gets involved with everything. It was a time of behavioural psychology and she would use us as part of her experimental subjects at times. This was a time where they were trying to look at relaxation methods and the beginning of some biofeedback with alpha waves, alpha or beta waves, whatever. My father, being an engineer, would design the equipment and then we would get hooked up, and it's really actually pretty funny. And then it being a behavioural time also, my mom would bring home some of the animals that were going to be part of the lab experiments. So we would have lizards, we always had lots of animals, but there were lizards and in order to feed all the lizards (and I don't know what experiment they were using all the lizards for) we had to have lots of crickets. So I remember we had a bathroom and the bathtub was used for keeping the crickets because it was sort of slick and the crickets couldn't crawl out of that. I think that had some influence even though I wasn't really interested in the sort of psychology per say my mother was doing, I was very interested in psychobiology.

So when I graduated from high school in 1973 - I went to a school that didn't really emphasize education - I don't think I got a very good education. But, it was the district I grew up in and the socioeconomic standing of the district, it was one of the Los

Angeles School District schools. And there really wasn't, I didn't receive any college guidance or career guidance; it was something I came up with on my own. At the same time, it was always assumed in my family (uncles, my mother, my father) that I would continue on in school, though it was never talked about. It was just sort of assumed, but there was no guidance around that. {12:40} But for some reason, I was very interested in psychobiology and at the time I think there was one school in California, Santa Cruz, that had psychobiology as a major, and I can't remember where the other school was out of state. But we didn't travel much as a family, hadn't been out of LA that much except up to the mountains, to the beach, so I just applied to a psychobiology program, Santa Cruz.

The way the UC, University of California system worked, you ranked at that time your preference of schools, and actually I think there were two schools. The other school that offered a psychobiology major at the time was University of California Riverside. And this is the campus that nobody's heard of, it's sort of in the semi-desert, very small campus, pre-med campus. So I end up going to UC Riverside; it's an hour outside of LA, an hour from Palm Springs, an hour from the Beaches, so kind of in the middle of nowhere. And I hated chemistry, I really hated chemistry, and I really didn't like calculus. And even though I was getting very decent grades, I remember just pulling out of calculus, pulling out of chemistry, and my father, I remember, being very upset. Chemistry had been a major he had started in and had wanted to complete, and so he was invested in my doing, not being a chemistry major, but finishing the chemistry series.

Now what's important here is that at this point I was paying for my own schooling, my own tuition. I lied about my age because I wasn't 18 when I graduated, so I lied about my age to get a factory job and I would just work massive overtime during the summer, and then I would work jobs during the school year. I'm also a potter, so every quarter there would be quarterly pottery sales and that would be part of where I would earn some of my money. It was very interesting that there was this empowered piece; even though at 18, 19 you do care what parents think, I was paying for my own education. So in dropping chemistry and calculus, I couldn't be a psychobiology major, so I was going to be a psychology major. I had excellent, excellent instructors. The professors were just wonderful in taking interest in me. And so my declared major was psychology.

But, part of what was missing in psychology was really the whole notion of systems. Given that my growing up socialization had been so much around how political forces, social forces, historical forces shape people and what they think - they pass it on and they don't question it - psychology had none of that. So I took sociology courses and I just loved sociology. It came to be very practical as I was getting to finish school. I ended up double majoring in sociology and psychology, and then having to choose what I was going to do from there. I'm a very practical person because I've had to always figure out how to support myself, and I figured, okay, if I went into sociology all I could think of was that I would be a sociology professor. And so that would just be

the only track I knew of for a job, and if I couldn't get a job, or if I didn't like the job, then I would be stuck. And I thought well, I like psychology and there would be different things I could do with psychology. So I was aware that I could be a professor, and I was aware that I could maybe do something around counselling with people, so I then chose to go to graduate school in psychology.
{16:56}

Now here again is where the subtle things around language (English was my second language) just would show up - as well as the poor education. When I went to college, I had tested so poorly in English, on the SATs, that I was put into bonehead English. Then the second quarter of that was literature. I was an avid reader. I had read everything that was on the course list, had written papers. The paper I was most proud of didn't get handed back to me - the professor asked me to stay and then accused me of plagiarism, which was very frightening because I thought, "Oh my gosh, I'll get kicked out of school, what am I going to do?" But it was this continuation of what I had had in childhood: "you couldn't possibly have written that paper." I just didn't know how to take these tests, and so there's that sort of thing going through. I took the SATs, I didn't do very well on the SAT's, or the GRE's for graduate school, that was it. I didn't do that well on the SAT's - I always did great on the math part. I didn't do super well on the GREs the first time around and I was trying to apply to clinical schools. I had done a short internship at a community mental health centre, I was interested in community mental health, and I had applied to some of the UC clinical programs. So I had applied to UC Berkley, I had applied to UCLA clinical programs, and again paying for all this myself; so you pay for your GRE's, you pay for the application fee, so I wasn't applying to a lot of schools. I was aware that there were now these professional schools of psychology that were emerging. They were just outrageously...I mean I just couldn't fathom how one would pay for something like that.

So anyway, I didn't get into clinical graduate school the first time around. And I always tell some of my clients, "Try, try, try! I didn't get in the first time around!" It was scores. So I ended up...and I'm not sure how I did this...One of my professors was Ovid Tzeng, who was a cognitive psychologist. I was working in the labs running experiments in cognitive as well as behavioural psychology. When I say "cognitive" it's like information processing versus cognitive behavioural. But he was just really wonderful (I think he was from Taiwan) and he pulled strings to try to get me into a graduate program I hadn't applied to. I don't know why I would have applied to it, but Claremont Graduate School in Claremont California, and in the Cognitive Psychology, PhD program. And then one of my professors pulled strings that some exception was going to be made that I had the option to work, to go into graduate school at UC Berkley as one of Arthur Jensen's graduate students. I remember going up and meeting Arthur Jensen and really not knowing anything about the IQ studies and controversies and his standing and all of that, I didn't even know all about that analysis, social analysis, that was being done. I remember him being a very nice man and having no interest in what he was doing. So I declined (I think he was in Ed Psych.) to work with him.

{21:09}

So I ended up default, I got married, my husband was finishing graduate school, Cal State Long Beach, so we were going to stay in the Southern California area, so I went to Claremont graduate school. I started out as a cognitive psychologist and had William Banks, this very multi-gifted funny man as my major advisor. I think he could tell that my heart was not into cognitive psychology. So I'm doing this cognitive psychology thing, I finish all the coursework, I finish the Master's thesis, so now I'm all but the dissertation. I barely got through the Master's thesis because my heart wasn't into it. I did something around semantic processing of sound. My father built the machine for me to use for these experiments - fortunate I am. So I quit school because I realized at that point that if I finished, if I went on and did my dissertation, I would feel very compelled to go get a job as a cognitive psychologist, and I was pretty sure that I wasn't going to be a very good one. So that was very hard - to quit without something in hand. I did reapply to graduate school, I applied to clinical again, and I had worked in Laura Schreibman's autism clinic that happened to be located in the Claremont Colleges group of colleges. And that was very interesting although that didn't really count as "clinical clinical." So again, I was still going to be in this position where I had lots of lab experience, but it was cognitive stuff. I had been teaching at Pitzer, but it was typical intro stuff.

So I had applied to, in the UC system (which I really think is a very good system) and I couldn't think of applying out of state again because of the tuition costs. And the whole thing of loans - I couldn't fathom if I got a loan how I would ever pay it off. So there's this lack of education as to how the system works, as well as growing up really working class, that "Oh my gosh, if you take on a loan how do you ever pay that off?" So I still don't have much guidance in to how to apply to graduate school. I was coming out of a graduate program that didn't have a clinical component, and clinical wasn't what they wanted people to do, much less quit.

So I applied to school and my selection process wasn't like many people I know who really studied things really carefully. I knew that I needed to stay on the West Coast and I needed to be by water. Part of staying on the West Coast was being near family, so that started limiting the number, cutting down the number of schools. I think the research piece that I did do, there were two pieces: I wanted to be in a city that had a significant Asian American population, and I wanted to be a professor, a teaching professor, a research professor. So I wanted to go to a school where it was rated very well and the faculty really did publish. And at the time the University of Washington was like number two in the country; very good clinical program. So I apply, very naively, and I end up getting accepted to work with Stan Sue. I was just really lucky. I think at the time in the US, there might have been like two Filipino psychologists, and I think Stan was quite aware of that. And I think when I came, I maybe wasn't quite what Stan

expected. But Stan was wonderful and he was just wonderful with his students and really developing this camaraderie amongst us. {26:00}

So I am in the clinical program, I am being mentored, definitely, I'm now finally being mentored, doing the research, Stan really orienting me to publication and then I find out that Stan's going to transfer to UCLA. I said, "Stan, how could you do that?!" So I found that out in spring of my second year. So I crammed to take my general exams, my qualifying exams, before he left. I was also then at that point, in my second year, an APA minority fellow, and that also plays in very significantly. Stan, I remember, handing in my written exam and has a little airplane bag in his office because I think he's going straight to the airport. We kept in touch, I mean he still continued to be a mentor, but that really actually had a positive impact in that I finished graduate school a year early because things were just pushed. And again there was always this thing about how was I going to pay for things. So I had to change advisors, I had to get a new advisor, and what I needed was someone who understood women's issues.

Shirley Feldman-Summers was at the University of Washington, a social psychologist, did some of the initial work on women and rape. I needed somebody who understood systems, because again, psychology really didn't do systems. So I ended up splitting this advisorship between two professors who were just so gracious and willing to do that. So Bill Friedrich ended up being my advisor, and both professors were really wonderful. I didn't follow Stan's advice, because Stan said, "Do something mainstream, get yourself established, then you can do the ethnic research." I always joke with him about this. So doing research even on women wasn't going to fit his advice at the time, so this would be like '81/'82. I've always done work on gender because here it is, that is a system's system of thinking. So I took on a dissertation that was a treatment outcome study of bulimia. I devised one of the first group treatment programs in the country and ran that and did my internship the same year. I, at that point, didn't really know what to do next. Things were changing with my advisors in terms of Shirley Feldman-Summers moving out of the university and I think I was actually just sort of tired. I finished the program in four years, was doing a dissertation and internship the same year, so I just took a pause and thought, "Okay, well I've got to find a way to support myself."

So after I graduated, because I had this group treatment program I continued community group treatment programs, set up a clinic. Looking back I can't believe that now. So I got an office and I gave myself three months to make it work. And I just laugh now because that's ridiculous. But I was fortunate in that it did work and I basically ended up in general practice but with a speciality, thinking I would then go back into academia; I would apply for jobs that year. But work was so busy that I didn't get around to that. But I was writing up parts of the dissertation and actually during my dissertation I had written another book; that was my dissertation diversion.

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It was *Wounded Spirits, Poisoned Potions* - it was really looking at that part that psychology also didn't do at the time, and is just now starting to do, which is really looking at the effect of trauma and how it relates to the symptoms that we see and how we approach treatment. And so my thinking already was that there is something that gets very damaged to the essence of one's spirit and that it's trans-generational. So, people turn to potions, addictions, as the way of trying to infuse themselves with a fuller sense of spirit that isn't real, but it takes on a life of its own. I didn't get that book published. And then a colleague and I, right after my dissertation, wrote a self-help book for treatment of bulimia, and there was one already on the market. We got an agent, tried to place the book, and couldn't place it because the agent said that there was already one book out there. The publishers were thinking that there wouldn't be a very big audience for self-help books on eating disorders. So that book just got shelved somewhere. Meanwhile, I had been writing already on...so I was doing two tracks: I was doing the eating disorder track and I was writing in the area of Asian American mental health - Stan had been very influential in that. And that is really what I had trained to do; I had trained to be a clinician, but I really was still thinking I was going to be a professor.

And in Seattle there is a very interesting community of women who are in practice and publish, it is very unusual. There's Laura Brown, [Dorcy Greene], [Mary Lee Klunis] {33:12}, there are several people who have done wonderful work and contributions to psychology. So that didn't seem odd to me to write and not be in academia. So I was just doing that. I was doing a workshop, presenting some of the dissertation work I think that next year after I graduated. I graduated in 1983, and I can't remember what association it was for, it might have been one of the family therapy associations, but I was co-presenting with Bill Friedrich and Pat Fallon. I was approached to do a book on bulimia, kind of a research conceptualization book, and out of my treatment program I had really developed a systemic conceptualization of eating disorders that wasn't just gender based, but also trauma based. So I start to now weave in trauma to the work, and it was impossible not to, working with ethnic populations and working with women. So that book gets published in 1986, and I'm publishing other pieces of work and continuing to actually gather research data from the clinic, and I can't remember what some of the initial pieces of writing I did, what those pieces were in terms of Asian American psychology, or where I placed them, but I just kept writing on those two tracks and I ended up staying in private practice.

I had never planned to be a private practitioner. I had wanted the skills, but I had never planned to be a private practitioner. What is so interesting about that, and how life unfolds, is if I had ended up as a university professor, a lot of my work really would have been shaped by the grants that were available, as well as what would get me tenure. And the work I was doing wouldn't get me tenure, I'm pretty sure. It would be very tough. And at the time there were several professors in the department, women professors who were excellent, who ended up leaving the University of Washington

psychology department because of their work. Even looking back now I think it was superb; it just wasn't the convention or acceptable. I think they were doing some cutting edge work; rape, sexual abuse, and some community psychology combined with sexual abuse. So that also influenced me in terms of, well maybe I better stay in private practice because the university hasn't been very kind to women. And because I was in this community where women were writing and it didn't seem that unusual; I didn't always pay attention to what convention was.

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So the areas I've developed: I've written a lot on disordered eating in women and I think maybe the first article on women of colour. A special issue that Pam Reid, I believe edited, it might possibly be *Women and Therapy*, but I think it was the first article on women of colour and disordered eating and the dynamics of that. I was just sort of percolating ideas about ethnicity and race. I mean I was writing what I call some of the conventional stuff on Asian American psychology, but I was very interested in identity. I remember I was meeting other psychologists who had backgrounds similar to myself; so here's the joke, you end up studying yourself, which I hadn't been doing. But there were other Eurasian psychologists, Amerasian psychologists, who had Asian mothers (they had immigrated while young) and were the culture brokers for their mothers and were culturally fairly fluent, switching back and forth, because my generation of Amerasians – Amerasian being a term that covers White Asian, Black Asian – we were fairly fluent in the cultures. And our brothers and sisters after us, in the same family, weren't necessarily as fluent. That's just how it went, with the dynamic, particularly if you were the oldest.

So I met, and I don't know under what circumstance, but at some psychology conference I met Christine Hall and quickly recognized that she's mixed also. I still had never met another Filipino psychologist because there were only two in the nation and they weren't on the West Coast. And then I met George Kitahara Kich and I just started kind of keeping in mind - well they had done some very interesting work and it hadn't been published; their dissertations were on that. And then I became aware of Michael Thorton's work. So Christine had done her dissertation on Black Japanese. As a result of doing that [*work*], she had to create words and had problems with the committee, she said, because she was using words that didn't exist but were necessary. George looked at stages of identity, and Michael Thornton also did a dissertation on Black Japanese. So I remember getting a hold of their dissertations and just holding that information in mind, really liking them as people, and thinking they were thinking systemically. So there was really part of the attraction. I mean personally I was attracted to them because we shared some period of experience, in terms of being Asians, but what really attracted me to their research was the systemic nature of it.

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Given the family I grew up in, my experience of being mixed race was really different than most mixed race people I know. So I can really say I wasn't studying myself because if I had been, I would have come up with a different model and it wouldn't fit most people, it would have been too narrow. I still was interested in academia, so it wasn't totally out of my blood. I loved doing the writing, loved doing the research, but it was hard to do in private practice because you don't get grants, so I had to fund it myself.

Anyway, a position comes open that I happen to read in the Monitor that there's a visiting professor at the University of Hawaii. Well, I love the beach and I love the sun and that was like a dream job; if I could just get a position at the University of Hawaii for a year! So I applied, it was a long shot, but as good fortune would have it I got the job. So I was just thrilled and I can't remember if that was 1989, it might have been 1989/90 school year. So I moved to Honolulu for a year and in my head is: "This is going to be the year that I'm going to pull together a book on mixed race." I had the experience writing the bulimia book, or at least getting a book published and I had these people I had met whose dissertations I had read. So I started networking by telephone while living in Honolulu, meeting other people and reading their work; Reggie Daniel, who was finishing his dissertation at UCLA who was looking at the Brazilian mixed race experience and Teresa Williams - these people weren't psychologists. Reggie was Latin American studies, and then later I met Teresa Williams and I think she was sociology, and Cindy Nakashima might have been ethnic studies - so people were in different disciplines doing this work. I became aware of Jim Jacobs' work, he was a psychologist in Northern California. A lot of the work was being done on the West Coast because there were a lot of us on the West Coast. So there are some regional characteristics of where populations are, where immigration has taken place.

So I get the idea that I'm going to put this book together. I write up a proposal and I send it to Sage because Sage was one of the publishing houses that already looked like they had a commitment to books around race and ethnicity. The book got accepted and we all put together, or I put together the book with all of us in it. My reason for doing this book was that I was pretty certain that the mixed race population was going to grow and I had read some of the really early work on mixed race people, and it was just totally racist. It was misogynistic. I mean it was just awful. It was good that none of us read that work growing up! So the purpose for doing the first book, *Racially Mixed People*, was thinking that there was going to be another generation after those of us who had done this initial work. In order for them to get permission or the okay to do masters theses or dissertations there had to be a published literature and there was next to no contemporary published literature that was very good. So that was my purpose. It was really, again, a systems purpose of how it would make it easier for those who would come next, where they would have the research foundation in this book. It would be people's dissertations basically summarized, and I think that is the purpose it did end up serving. So I was really, really pleased with that.
{44:25}

I think right before that book was published, Laura Brown had mentored me in doing...We co-edited a book and that was my first editing experience. We co-edited a book, *Women and Therapy,* feminist perspective. It came out of a conference, mostly out of a conference, that was held in Seattle - it was one of the first conferences really trying to do the intersection of gender (women), race, and ethnicity. So that was a very positive experience.

The book, *Racially Mixed People,* had the effect I had hoped it to have. It did pave the way for other people. In that book some people had already proposed stage models. None of them actually were based on the models of Black identity that had already emerged at the time because in researching mixed race identity, some of it just looked different at the time. So that was actually very useful. I also just loved the work on racial identity that was coming out with Bill Cross' work, Janet Helms came a little bit later...there was just some very, very interesting work taking place. I personally could not relate to it, in terms of stages, so that was going to inform my work in terms of what was happening, that was different, that may not fit the stage models as well.

I started developing my ecological framework of racial identity, and this would not have gotten me tenure. So this is, again, where I am just so fortunate that I didn't end up in an academic department because I probably would have been laughed out of there, discouraged from doing the work, or I wouldn't have been able to do as much of it as I did. And I was using really more sociological models for the development of my model. It wasn't a psychology model, but really crossing psychology with sociology. So very interesting that the sociology background came back in. So that was published, 1992 I believe, and that book won the Gustavus Myers Centre, one of their awards, book awards, that next year. And that's a centre also dedicated to peace.

So then in a little while I started thinking – I was part of a couple of grassroots organizations that supported mixed-race families and individuals. One of them, AMEA, Association for Multi-Ethnic Americans had started *[in the]* early 80s and had already been talking with people at the Census about thinking that there was going to be some change in the population, and the kind of mono-racial codes that were available might become problematic, and would there be the possibility of checking more than one or having a multi-racial category. And there were a lot of political things that went on at the grassroots level, and 1990 Census of course, there was no change. But there were enough people checking the "other" category that AMEA and then project RACE coming out of the Midwest, were being heard again. And then the 1992 book gets published.

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And I remember, I think it was in 1994, I was in Washington D.C., Department of the Census. A group studying this question had asked me to come in and they violated copyright by making multiple copies of that book, all Xerox copies sitting at the table as

I went in. They just asked questions about, some of them why, but they were more interested in, as sociologists would be, the form of the question for how they were then going to analyze the data. What became clear to me in that meeting was, or my interpretation (I had already been thinking this, and the dialogues that many of us had been having), was that if one looked at how the Census Bureau over time had done the race question. So if you were mixed race there was a point, initially you were identified by the father's race, but then with some of the mixing with white fathers you were identified by the mother's race because then you wouldn't be identified as white. And then you were supposed to identify the way your community would identify you, which meant you're supposed to know the rules of race and anything that isn't quote "pure white" is not white, so you have to check one of the other white boxes.

So I thought there needs to be a book that starts to look at policy, and just speak to these questions now. The first book really was really more a developmental compilation of developmental studies and systems studies. So I put together *The Multiracial Experience*, which was published in 1996, and that was primarily a policy book. Not as popular as the first book, but I think it was really, really important to document certain things that were going on at the time, the discussions that were going on, and what that meant for the future.

Right prior to that book, or as that book was being published (I can't remember - I'm really terrible at remembering my own publications) I took a professor position. So I do another foray now into academia, because I did the one year at the University of Hawaii, it was a visiting position, and then I returned to Seattle. It was a year I thought long and hard about what I want to do, and I really liked the freedom of private practice. So here now I've done this full turn of, "I like private practice." But a position became open at the University of Washington, a tenure track position, in the Department of Ethnic Studies. And given my work, I really wasn't looking like a pure psychologist, so ethnic studies was a perfect department; it was a multidisciplinary department. So when I entered that department in the fall of 1995, what it did allow me to do was some of the other writing I wanted to do. And I think I was finishing up the multiracial experience book, but – Seattle has proportionally one of the largest Filipino populations in the US, and one of my uncles had let me know that before I moved up here (as he had edited one of the LA newspapers for the Filipino community). But I thought, "Okay, so we're a growing population" and all this stuff I read in graduate school was Japanese, Chinese, and nothing on Filipinos. So I thought, "Oh, and we are different. Our history is different, the culture is different." I mean there are some shared values with Japanese and Chinese for certain, but we're sort of a Malaysian people and mixture and you have the colonization, first by the Spanish and then by the Americans. That means change of religion, change of language, change of names. So that really affects a people.

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So I thought this would be wonderful, I'm now in an ethnic studies department, I don't have to do a psychology book, I can do a multidisciplinary book on Filipino Americans. So I put together a book on Filipino Americans and I did not, maybe half the contributors were academics and half weren't. That was also this other piece in terms of who had the information that really had real life application, for example, for looking at health, or looking at community organizing, for looking at identity, etcetera. So I was able to do that book while I was at the University of Washington - I was tenured, I did a very short stint there, ended up not being really – feeling actually quite constrained by the academic environment.

Then politics came into play, and I don't know how relevant, well this is relevant, but I don't know how relevant it will be to the history, but ironically there is this conflict between – in the Filipino community there isn't just one community. There's a joke that if you have two Filipinos, how many organizations do you have? Well you have three: you have yours, mine, and ours, and that comes out of a colonized, oppressed, experience - everybody wants to be, you know, have some chance to lead, everybody has something to say. But there's also a conflict between the visibility of American born and Philippines born Filipinos, and usually the Philippines born Filipinos came here as students or as young adults, so they grow up in the Philippines and are bilingual at least, and come here as adults. And then you have the American born that are really post 1965 cohort in that the immigration laws changed in 1965. So all of a sudden, instead of 25 Filipinos allowed per year or something, up until then, there were a lot more allowed. I kind of fall in between because I came in the '50s and I don't have a real large cohort. I have my cousins and a few other people I knew, but this conflict between American born and Philippine born played out in the community, somewhat in the department. It was very unfortunate because here I was in a department that was multidisciplinary, was supposed to have more wisdom than usual around how history operates and how systems operate, and it was kind of a microcosm of society in that the oppressed became the oppressors. It was most unfortunate.

Many ethnic groups have the crab pot mentality metaphor, that if someone is kind of moving too far ahead, you pull them back. I think some of that was operating, and then this thing was operating that I wasn't the right kind of Filipino, as though there's one right kind. And part of that I think was as Asian American, and I was the first Filipino tenured faculty at the University of Washington. I think that went without the University's notice; it doesn't matter what department. The department could not see the bigger picture and there was a lot of in-fighting. It started affecting my productivity, so I resigned.

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I kept up a small private practice, but I went back into private practice where I would be able to do my work, ironically speaking. Even though that ethnic studies department, if there wasn't all the (58:58) [kind of just or conscious] history of oppression that we've all had, and if the department had worked it out, it would have been a good

place to be. So I went back into private practice, continued doing my work, and I left the university; I took leave in 1998. I was one of the first people of colour at the University to get one of their faculty royalty grants, and my taking leave versus quitting was that I wanted to finish the research I was doing with my faculty grant. So I waited until I finished and then I handed in my resignation.

WP – Okay, that's extensive.

MR – More than you wanted to know.

WP – No, no. Now I would like to double back a little bit. I want to ask about - you made a statement about your work on trauma and gender and then of course in terms of race and ethnicity. I want to ask you about the strengths as well in communities of colour, in terms of dealing with trauma. I mean people sometimes refer to it as resilience of course, but what do you think, for example, would be a cultural strength that comes out of the Filipino experience?

MR – We're fighters and we know we will survive. And I think that's the resilience piece across ethnic communities. I also think a strength is if you do some of the decolonization, it is a very rich culture. It's a culture where the idea of causality is very different, and I think that's a real strength. Maybe that's my mother's influence, again kind of saying it's better than the mainstream, but I think there is strength in being sort of a hybridized culture. So there's sort of this belief in Western notions and linear causality, but deep down, when you're in families and talking about certain things and people have let down, you know they don't have to prove anything, people oftentimes are still operating on a polytheistic sort of operation of causality. I remember growing up, my two uncles that were in the US were scientists, both involved with the development of the laser. My father ended up an engineer, my mother had a degree in chemistry, my aunt, her first cousin, had I think also a degree in chemistry - so it's a family of scientists. And I would be exposed to these discussions they would be having - all these discussions of math, science, chemistry. It's amazing that I didn't want to finish chemistry, but in those same family get-togethers there would be something like, "Now you remember so and so? It was said he spontaneously combusted. Now is that possible?'" It really would be entertained as a very serious question from the point of view scientifically, what would it take for someone to spontaneously combust, as well as on a more psychic phenomenon level - what might that be about. As well as, "Oh so and so's hair turned grey overnight" - same thing. So the family had no problem, my father had a problem with this, but the rest of the family had no problem going back and forth.

It was quite funny, and those discussions really have – I think there's a tremendous strength of being able to go back and forth because I think in the work that I've been able to do, whether it was around gender, trauma, whatever, I'm always going back and forth between theories and systems, and it feels fairly easy because that's what we

did, and I think that's what Filipinos do. I think that's what a lot of ethnic people do because in order to really make it in mainstream society, you have to be able to code switch, you have to be able to do some of that fluidity. So I think that flexibility, kind of the cognitive flexibility, the experiential flexibility, is an incredible strength and I think it's an incredible strength we bring to psychology.

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WP – Let me ask a related question. A Filipino psychologist who died, I think within the last decade, Virgilio Enriquez has done this marvellous work on the developing Filipino psychologist.

MR – Right, it's a liberation psychology. I had met him on one of my trips to the Philippines, and then when I was at the University of Hawaii that year, he was a visiting professor also in another department, so we would have lunch and talk. It's so wonderful that you know him.

WP – What's your sense of his contribution? I mean I've read his stuff and read things about him, but from what I've read what has impressed me is the sociality of Filipino psychology. I mean the terms that were used in Tagolog that indicated very nuanced social relationships and approaches. Also, what has really influenced me and impressed me is the idea of producing a very local knowledge - making the claim that this is true about Filipinos, but not necessarily true about everybody else.

MR – I think that was Virgilio Enriquez's contribution. I know on one of my trips to the Philippines in the mid '80s, after I had graduated, I don't know how I found out about his work, but I wanted to meet him. And I had a chance to meet him, oh I know - one of my aunts chaperoned me to the University of the Philippines, and I was meeting some of the faculty members. I was asking who writes about Filipino psychology and that's how I became aware of his work. I was told well he writes about it, as well as, [(1:05:07) *inaudible*], it was Filipino psychology from the psychic phenomenon end (I think both are now deceased). So I went to one of the libraries in Quezon city, which people kind of regard as Manila too, but where I would be able to access Enriquez's work and then looking how I could purchase it to bring it back, because we didn't have access to it in the US at that time. So I was able to also find a bookstore...He had one book I really wanted (I'm very visually oriented - green cover) that basically was liberation psychology. It was his foundation of Filipino psychology. But as writing Filipino liberation psychology, I mean some of it really should not be written in English. I do not read Tagolog at a level that would be academic at all. I read the menu, I read family relations, I read getting in trouble, I read celebrations, but I don't read academia. So unfortunately there was some work that looked, I mean I could tell from the titles, it looked very, very interesting but it was not accessible to me.

I did bring back his work and then on another trip I was able to pick up some more work, and then in '89/'90, we would have lunch. He was just this really ordinary, like myself, this ordinary person. It was wonderful that I got the chance to talk to him many times about what he was doing, why it was important. His work in the Philippines for the most part really wasn't valued at the time, because you had to do a lot of decolonizing to be able to think his work was really cutting edge. It was cutting edge, and the psychology he writes is very much, it is a relational psychology, it is a relational society and culture. It's a tribal society originally and still in parts of the Philippines. So I think in terms of the fact that it's relational, I think most groups that still really have an ethnic origin contact very strongly, whether they're European based, Asian based, African based, Latino based, they would relate to this idea of relational psychology. What's different is the system of relations. You see some overlap with other Asian cultures in that there are some of the terms. So if you're not in the culture and you read his green book, and he lays out in English certain terms, so (1:08:25) [*inaudible*] and these are things that occasionally you'll see anthropologists or cross-cultural psychologists writing about. And because they're not actually really ensconced in the culture, or haven't been disciplined in the culture, and it's a culture that uses humiliation and shame as part of your socialization to do the relationships right, some of those terms aren't exactly translated well. So part of his contribution was he wrote about that, and he wrote about why. I think it was in that publication, it might be in something else, why Americans trying to be culturally sensitive could not get the concept of those terms - it had to do with a very different relational system.

It wasn't just a system of respect, but within the system of respect there are certain hierarchies and then there's ways of showing respect that, I don't think we have here in a general mainstream American culture. That there's a respect that can show at the same time you don't actually hold the person in high esteem. And there's a respect for someone who is held as an elder, and may not be a family remember. So there's just a whole system of relations and within that it really tells you how you're supposed to act right. So it's about acting right, and if you act right, things go well, and that part of what he writes about is what got disrupted, as it does with genocide and colonization and dislocation. The systems of relations gets...some of the traditions get weakened - not exactly lost, but they get weakened out of survival and other systems of relations. So he was really trying to restore and bring pride and kind of illuminate how this system was very specific.

Then my last trip in 2003 (because whenever I go back I try to get books) there were a whole lot more books that were available, just even in the mainstream bookstore, that were really coming out of a liberation psychology, and talking about family systems. But I could tell that some of it wasn't his liberation psychology, there still was an internalization and valuing of Western being better in some way, some of the time.

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WP – Yeah, let me ask about that. Given your work on gender, race, and ethnicity, and your experience of Filipino psychology, when you look ahead and you think about a globalizing world and certainly for at least two or three generations, if not more, there have been pretty overt attempts to, if you will, impose a kind of psychological imperialism on the rest of the world. The way the US does it - that's 'real' psychology. It's like white being the default colour.

MR – Right.

WP – What do you see here? I mean are we going to make a space for Indigenous psychologies and recognize our own as an Indigenous psychology here in the US, and if so, what role does this whole movement of racial and ethnic minority psychology, which I really date from the 60s, and the Association of Black Psychologists - what role is that going to play? Or are we in fact really going to become inclusive?

MR – I would like to be more optimistic and say yes we'll become inclusive, but I think we have so many cultural groups. Even within the Philippines or among Filipinos, there are some very different cultural groups. In the Southern Philippines the religion is Muslim; people don't know that as a rule. So culturally, even in terms of how the people dress, even how they look, they look different - the culture is different. Go Northern Luzon, versus Southern Luzon, versus kind of the mid islands, it's different. So I think right now internationally, there is a move towards Indigenous psychology, which I think is really wonderful. How is that going to influence the work we do here in American psychology? I'm not sure. I mean, I think what's going to happen is that we will try to take on parts of those, but I think the problem is that if we take on just parts, it's not going to...taking on a part of something, it's totally out of context.

WP – Well you're a systems thinker so...

MR – Right, right, so that actually would be my concern, and I mean I would be so appreciative of people looking at that work and using it as a way to think, to understand how oppression has operated historically, for psychology to become more historically and politically minded. So I think that actually has value, no matter who co-opts what in terms of psychology. I think Indigenous psychologies will make us as a discipline, have to be more history oriented and more politically oriented, and so that means socially oriented. But then in terms of moving from that lens to how does that then translate into understanding the individual and the diagnostic system and whether someone is a recent immigrant and where they're from, or they're third generation, it just gets so complicated - and that's just for Filipinos. If we look at all the different Asian groups, it's like Pacific Islanders are lumped into Asians, and Filipinos are actually a combination of Asian and Pacific Islander, and some Filipinos will identify as Pacific Islander and then some as Asian American. So I think the most immediate value I see is just as the psychologies brought about in the 60s and 70s looking at Black identity development and why certain things happen. Even though I always think of those as

really trauma models, originating in trauma, we will become more historically oriented, and that to me is already a tremendous change in psychology. Then I wouldn't have had to been a sociology major also!

WP – What has been, if any, your involvement in the Asian American Psychological Association?

MR – Active member, attending the conferences. We always have the conference, it's one day before APA since many of us are coming in we can do both conferences. And presenting, and then personally what I've been waiting for is more Filipino psychologists. So what's really been wonderful, when I go to the Asian American Psychology conferences, that over the last almost ten years, there really is a generation of Filipino psychologists coming up. And part of that is many of them have American born parents, or parents who are more amenable to their children choosing a discipline, because psychology is not one of the areas usually Filipino parents want their kids to go in. I realize when I talk Filipino, given how I grew up, I'm actually thinking Filipino parents born in the Philippines. But I mean first generation, even second generation, there's still some kind of trace of what is valued and what is desired for the kids. But it's just so exciting. There are more than ten young Filipino psychologists coming up or just finishing, so I think that's going to influence psychology, because as our voices, I mean one of the things I try to do when I do presentations where I am talking about Asian Americans, I try to use Filipino examples, because otherwise there's not much heard about Filipinos.

WP – Yeah, it's true. Just kind of a perspective question, what do you think can come out of the experience of oppression, in terms of informing psychology?

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MR – Well again I think that if we truly understand, if we acknowledge oppression, I mean we're all oppressors, we're all perpetrators at some point in time. No matter how much liberation we've tried to do at times, you know we have those vestiges of internalized oppression. So I think there are several things that would have to happen at once because I think just knowing about oppression, I don't think really does much; it makes a lot of White people feel guilty. But I think if we look at, and that's not the purpose of it, but I think if we look at oppression, again in a larger context of how does oppression work, and how does it work across groups regardless of what the event has been, I mean so that we actually maybe take a more sociological focus. I think that what informs some of the development of some of the psychology models, I think that will probably need to change, or the conceptualizations of things would need to change. And I look at it if one really recognizes oppression and truly recognizes the effects of oppression, psychology would have to move out of a current time emphasis and have to look at multigenerational influence, not just in a family therapy sort of way, but how we carry those who come before us. That's just true I think of any group that's been

oppressed, whether it's gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, culture, that there's something incumbent upon, just even unannounced, to someone carrying all that. So that would be very complicated for psychology models to explain: Why does this person feel so adamant about having a say, that they have to speak up, that they want the truth to be told, that they want their truth recognized? A cognitive-behavioral approach won't get this all done. Treatment would really have to be an approach with more of a political savvy; for whom, besides yourself, who else are you speaking for and why is it important and what is it that you can do that would really preserve their voice? And that would become a very common sort of theme I think, next generation, two generations.

WP – Thanks.

MR – Thank you.