

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Dr. Vanessa Prosper

Interviewed by Lucy Xie

Interview conducted remotely using Zoom platform

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VP: Vanessa Prosper, Interview Participant

LX: Lucy Xie, Interviewer

LX: Hi, my name is Lucy Xie. I am interviewing Dr. Vanessa Prosper in Boston, Massachusetts, and the date is April the 15th 2024. Could you please state your name, date, and place of birth?

VP: Okay, my name is Vanessa Prosper. Was I saying the date of birth or the date of today?

LX: The date.

VP: I'm sorry?

LX: Confirm the date and place of birth.

VP: Confirm the date. So, okay, my name is Vanessa Prosper. Today is April 15th, 2024, and my place of birth is Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

LX: Cool. So, I think we normally start out - I'm not sure if you had the chance to read through the interview protocol, but normally we start out these interviews by asking about how you first started to relate to feminism and/or other forms of gender or intersectional activism or theory. Was there a particular moment in time where it clicked for you? Has this always kind of been something that you valued or was it always something kind of present in your life? How did you start developing that part of your identity?

VP: I can, in my earliest memory, but I think at the time, because I was 12 and I don't - In retrospect, now that I'm older, see that it was always something that was in me. When you reflect back on something like, "Oh, that was actually something that I couldn't name but something that is part of feminism," looking back.

So, a little bit about my background so I can explain the context. Both of my parents are from Haiti. They're Haitian immigrants who immigrated to Montreal, Quebec, Canada. And the Haitian culture is very patriarchal, and the gender roles are such that the men are the providers, And the men should be—they're the providers, they're kind of the king of the house. They're also - in terms of gender roles in terms of chores, it's all the women. The men provide and they are being served. That's what I've observed in my own household. But also, in the households of others in Haitian culture. So, two things I think, and I've always been this kid who was observing.

So, in Haitian [culture], at parties, what I would notice is that there's always like a buffet, right? And it would always be the women who would do a plate for their respective husbands and bring it to them. And it always bothered me (I was 10) because I think I was always, kind of like, “But they're adults.” Like, why is it that they have to do that? So, these were kind of these internal conversations I had with myself.

But also noticing how much, even though I did observe that, unlike a lot of Haitian households where my dad was definitely supportive of my mom having a career. And my mom would kind of assert herself in terms of what she wants, but still in terms of their respective [gender roles], [they] were socialized as men and women and as partners within the Haitian culture. It was still expected that my mom would cook and clean and do everything. And then my dad is going to work providing financially, but it's still kind of irks me a little bit.

LX: Right.

VP: But also having to reconcile, being also born and raised in Montreal, the more kind of like North American, you know, French Canadian culture, where it's not like that.

LX: Right.

VB: So, I kind of reconciled the two, but I always knew from a young age that it bothered me. And so, in terms of “When did I start noticing” that I was very much a feminist, there was one morning where, you know, Saturday mornings, my mom is a retired kindergarten teacher, my dad is a physician. So, I'm 12 and it's Saturday morning and I would always go to my parents' room like, “Hey, how are you?” Blah, blah, blah. And my mom goes “Oh you know Vanessa I'm really really tired. Your dad is hungry. Go and cook some breakfast for him.” Mind you, I think at that age I only knew how to make eggs or whatever.

But I do remember vividly [that] I was so appalled. More so in the sense it's like you're asking me, the kid, to cook breakfast for a grown person who is also my parent, right? And I was really pissed. And also, in the Haitian culture, parents are strict. You're not supposed to talk back, but I

don't know what came over me. And I did say, but I'm the kid. Why can't he cook his own eggs? [Laughs]

LX: Yeah. Right.

VP: And I think yes, I definitely got sternly reprimanded for that, but I was so-I could not believe that. I didn't know who to be more mad at, if it was my mom or my dad. Because I was mad at my mom. Like, I understand you're tired, but you should just be like, "You know, if you want to eat, [say] like, 'Hey husband do whatever.'" But you actually would ask your daughter. I was mad at her for that, and then I was mad at him because you should even be like, "Oh, I'm hungry, you clearly see that your wife is tired, so just go and cook something" And so, I think from that day, I think I was like, "Oh, it's not like if I ever get married, I don't want it to be that way, but also, I don't agree with it." This is a part of my Haitian cultural heritage that I don't connect with.

In my journey as a child of immigrant parents and having to learn how to navigate both cultures and how to construct my identity I think I've learned okay, you know what? It's okay to hold onto the things from both cultures that I connect with, that really that I can relate to, and that I feel are part of my own core values and beliefs. And I'm going to let go of the part of the Haitian culture or the French-Canadian culture that I feel from my opinion are just preposterous.

And I think- so it's the combination of that, because when we're talking about feminism it's not only about women's rights, but it's also about social justice, right? And also having an unbiased opinion about people from different cultures, and we're talking about equality of access to resources and equality of how you're being treated and all this stuff. So, I think the other aspect for me comes from having both of my parents in different ways, like very much raising me to be a critical thinker, on my dad and then on my mom's part.

So, my dad was always training me and coaching all of his kids to be critical thinkers. I can remember thinking about equal rights and social justice and my dad loved to watch those western cowboy movies, right? Where the representation all the time is just like you have these white cowboys and then you have the indigenous people, and they are portrayed as being mean and bad. And so, I remember watching this, [with] my dad and I was very young, and I was like, "Oh those Indigenous people, they're so mean," and he was like, "Whoa, whoa, wait a minute," and then he kind of broke it down for me.

LX: I see.

VP: Okay, and that trained me to kind of [think] how do I see the world? I shouldn't just absorb it but start questioning things. And then my dad was always [teaching] anything about the Haitian culture or my African heritage and history. [They were teaching me] history and heritage just to

show me, kind of challenge what I may have had internalized as this Black kid, from a white patriarchal society.

LX: Right.

VP: And they were, hey, “Did you know this about your people being enslaved and what happened and what was going on in Africa prior to this happening.” And, as well the beauty of also the Haitian history and all of that.

And then for my mom, she would do that as well. And from my parents just really making sure that I'm proud of where I come from. So, in my household, it's Haitian paintings, Haitian art, right, all these things. And then my mom, she was, like I said, a former kindergarten teacher who, in Montreal, she would, the kids in her class were kids who were recent immigrants, that she normally not only did she have to teach them the kindergarten curriculum, but she also had to teach them to speak French.

But she was always exposed to so many different cultures. Having to do to work with multicultural families, and she would tell me all the stories and she would just, my mom just was very, she embraced all of that and she would just be like, “Did you know that in this culture it's like this?” And then the parents would bring my mom some dishes from their countries or things like that and then my mom would show it to me.

LX: Okay.

VP: So that I would say the start and beginning of my own passion for social justice and having an open mind. But also being very, very acutely aware of the inequalities.

LX: Right. So on a personal level, but also you're getting- you're being taught that from your family too, both of your parents and then...was there ever a point where you started learning that (I'm trying to figure out how to word this question), learned about feminism in and of itself, in an academic setting. Like was there ever that kind of moment?

VP: So, I think it wasn't until- So, all these things I was telling you [were] in my household and everything, I did my undergrad degree at McGill where no discussion about that was had.

LX: Right.

VP: And even in my psychology classes, I mean, I was a biology major and minor in psychology and then ended up doing a second major in psychology. But none of that was talked about. It's really interesting. So, it wasn't until I came to Boston College, for my master's degree in

counseling psychology, that then we had the multicultural class. And I think it's there that I was thinking about providing culturally relevant services, talking about racism, what's underneath racism, discrimination, understanding all these terms. I think I had some knowledge of it, but I didn't have a name for it.

LX: Right.

VP: And so, for me, I really loved that, like, multicultural class and your understanding about implicit bias, you know, all these things and then it gave me the vocabulary but also the understanding of concepts to better understand and grasp what I had observed, and what my parents taught me, right? And then-

LX: Right. Putting language to what your own personal experiences have been.

VP: Exactly, exactly. And I think feminism, it's in two parts. I started understanding a little bit from that and from some of my doctoral classes. And to be really honest I fully understand it once I had to teach a class titled 'counseling theories' where I had to teach feminist theories to my students. So, that counseling theories class for the masters students is divided into two classes, the class in the fall semester covers theories like behaviorism, person-centered and cognitive behavioral therapy and then the class in the spring covers, psychoanalysis, psychodynamic, psychoanalytical theories and feminist theories. And...I had to really read more so that I could teach it. And I was like, "oh, so wait a minute, I think in the media, so people would more think like feminism has to do with oh, [a] woman has to be equal to [a] man, but it's not that."

There's just so much more. It's not about being equal. Sometimes with my guy friends who don't understand the concept...I had a guy friend, for example, tell me "Oh, it's something, so funny women are feminist but they don't want to take the garbage out." I was like, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, it's not about that." It's not about like, oh, we want to...It's about having equal rights. It's about having equal access to resources. It's about also not being discriminated against or being biased so that you don't get the same opportunities right it's so much more than "I want to do my own thing, just like a man."

It's about how we are being treated. Then, in a bigger, larger scale, the feminist approach has to do with looking at who is who has privilege and who is oppressed. And who is, marginalized and making sure that there's no gap in between their access to resources and rights, and how they are being treated. And so, I think my understanding further, of feminism, further crystallized by reading more about it and having to teach it.

LX: This is the class at BC [Boston College], right?

VP: Yes, it's called counseling theories and personalities II in the spring semester.

LX: Oh good. I'm going back to what you were kind of talking about when you, cause I know that you did your, first bachelor's in biology and then you did psychology.

VP: Yes. Yes.

LX: I'm wondering If you could tell me a little bit more about what attracted you to psychology, what made you switch?

VP: Yeah, great question.

LX: Or sorry, what made you, not switch, but pursue another degree in psychology. And what pushed you to get into counseling psychology in particular? So, I guess it's a two-part question.

VP: Yeah, yeah, no, I'm more than happy to share that story. So pretty much as far as I can remember, I was attracted to 2 things. So, as I told you, my father is a physician. One thing that's great about my parents, that I admire about their parenting, which I think they did unconsciously, but now looking back at how they have raised me, I think I would say share that with all parents who do that is having a lot of dialogue and conversations about their own experiences. And so, we learned so much from that. So, my dad would tell us about his journey, becoming a physician, my mom, her journey becoming a teacher. And also, they would talk about their journey through how they have experienced and managed racism and discrimination, which was incredibly helpful. But with my dad who would always share stories with different cases and things, and also would explain to us certain things about how the body works. And I think from a young age to me it was very, very interesting. And then in ninth grade I had my first biology class, and I totally loved it. I really love to understand how the body works and all that all that stuff. And I think I always knew that I really want to be a physician.

But then at the same time, I was always drawn to ever since I was little to that kid that was rejected or bullied and wanting to understand what was going on and being there for them. And I also knew that I like helping people. So, I think going into college and choosing a major, I automatically knew that it was pre-med. And so, that's why I knew that I love biology. So that's why I majored in biology. And, but also, I knew I loved to learn about how the body works that I was very drawn to the brain as well and many functions of the brain and understanding that.

And so, when I went to McGill and I think as an elective, I took a psychology class and I was like, "Oh no, I really, really like this." And then my advisor was like, "You could do a minor if

you want.” I was like, “Okay, cool.” So that's how that came about. And then, I apply to med school, and I think I got waitlisted and I didn't get in. I was very discouraged. [I] didn't know what to do. And I was like, “You know what? If I cannot become a doctor, I definitely would love to be a psychologist.” And because I'm drawn to people, understanding what drives their behaviors, trying to understand them, really wanting to help them.

And I was like, “Hey, you know what? Why not?” And I really enjoyed the psychology classes. So, I was still wanting to be a doctor. I was like, “Okay, let me then do a second major in psychology and see what happens.” I don't know if it was a way to console myself to the fact that I didn't get in. And I was like, well anyway with being a physician, the specialties that I really would have done are specialties where I get to interact with people and talk to them, like a psychiatrist or being a pediatrician. And so, once I completed my double major, I think I reapplied to med school. It didn't work, and then I decided to take a year off.

So, I had a gap year, and I was like, “Okay, let's just take the time.” And so, during that year I volunteered at a—it was a program that was providing support and help with kids with all types of learning disabilities like dyslexia, and math learning disability, and I got to learn a lot about that, and I really enjoyed that as well. And so, I think during that year I applied to med school but also applied to grad school, which is then what, led me to Boston College.

I didn't know the difference between counseling psychology [and] clinical psychology, but upon reading stuff they were like, “Either degree will lead you to become a psychologist and do therapy.” And that's how I landed in the master's program, at BC in the counseling psychology faculty department.

LX: I see. So, it's kind of pivoting from understanding how the body works, to how people and their behavior works. I also know that previously you mentioned that there wasn't too much of a social justice focus, within your undergraduate training. So, it was like that for your biology degree as well as your psychology degree. And I also know that you mentioned that since an early age you've kind of developed this sort of awareness of social justice from your own personal life. Did you ever pursue feminist activism outside of school or outside of your classes? Did you have any involvement in feminist organizations or anything like that?

VP: I'm trying to think. I'm not this hardcore activist person.

LX: Okay.

VP: I do think, however, that I try, looking back once I was at BC I was definitely invested in participating in any opportunity much more academically, because for me it was my first foray into living on my own and living in a different country and all of that. And so, but I knew that I,

wanted to partake in initiatives and things that were readily available to me, via BC, where I could further either expand my mind in terms of understanding multiculturalism, feminist approaches and things like that, or trying to do something to help or to narrowed disparities or things like that. So, when I was a master's student, there was a kind of a social justice group or research [group] that I joined. I was like, "I want to participate in that." And I think we did the committee conference or something like that. And then, I participated in another- Sorry, it's so it's so way back in my mind because it's almost 20 years ago, (oh my god time flies). And maybe other things like just little things on campus that I can't think of but not like I said hardcore heavy-duty activism.

LX: Yes. I get it. Have you ever experienced any sort of discrimination? After you started learning about feminism, and getting more involved in feminism, in your work itself and after the multicultural course, or the class that you mentioned-

VP: At BC?

LX: Yes. And your masters. Once you started kind of integrating that more into your work.

VP: Yes, into my work, into my understanding of people, into my understanding of my own experiences because I think also the big shifts for me was having greater awareness. You know, covert racism. What is racism, what is discrimination, what are microaggressions. I think even those stories that I told you in my childhood, I was beginning to understand, but it got further got crystallized upon coming to BC.

LX: Right. Right.

VP: Growing up in Montreal, I realize now that the racism is extremely covert. To the point where I could have told you at some point when I was younger, oh, I don't [experience discrimination in Montreal], not that there's no racism and discrimination. I would have the view that it's only in the States that it's really that bad, Montreal is all cool.

LX: Right.

VP: And then now having studied it, having had the knowledge, having really sharpened my critical thinking, I'm like, "Oh my god, so not the case."

LX: Right.

VP: So, Montreal (I'll speak for Montreal because that's where I grew up) for example, little things about representation, growing up watching TV [there was] no black people. I think there

was one black actor and that was it. It wasn't until I was, I want to say in my early twenties, where there was a show where the main character was actually, she was a biracial woman.

And even little things. I'll share this thing with you. I'm looking back, like, "Oh my god, that's horrible." So, there was this kid's show, which would be the equivalent in terms of its relevance or it in terms of its meaning in French Canadian culture. It's a show that I would say that it would be the equivalent of Sesame Street, right? It's a show for kids, that there's some puppets sometimes, but the puppets were representing humans. So, at some point they introduced this black puppet. And in French-so her name, so they kind of merged letters, but her name means where is she from? But I never connected that, but that's not cool. First of all, and it's not representing the fact that you have all these black kids in Montreal who were born and raised in Montreal, and they are from Montreal.

LX: Right.

VP: Right? And it's a microaggression itself, but again, nobody in that show was consulted with people who were racially aware [who could inform them]. That's not how you introduce that.

LX: Right.

VP: And then there were no, there's no black actors or even any actors of color. And then also growing up, if I'm looking back at certain things, I was fortunate that I don't think I experience a lot of racism, which doesn't mean that there wasn't, but I do remember certain things like being in first grade, and this white girl telling me, "You're not pretty because you're too dark." Or at some point being on taking public transportation, and the woman behind me, who was maybe in her sixties. She was with her grandson, both white. And then I hear at some point maybe the grandson is asking... maybe he had never seen black people, so he was asking questions. And then her answer was like, oh, "She's a nigger," and just little things like that. But what I realized that I wasn't fazed by it, it's just kind of more like, you're taken aback. But I wasn't fazed by it because my parents had done a superb job instilling in me the pride into my race and my culture, but also because they had shared with me, extensively how they navigate racism.

LX: Right.

VP: So, I could manage my expectations. But instead of being like, "Oh my god, I can't believe she called me the N word," it was more like, "I can't believe that's how she's educating her grandson, and this is totally pathetic. This is somebody who's ignorant." So, it didn't impact my self-esteem, but it made me more aware.

But also, in terms of my own high school experience, in my classes I was only the only black girl in a class my year, in a class of 400 students, and I went to an all-girl high school, we only had 10 black girls, and that's it. So, you're just looking back at the little things in Quebec even to this day. For example, concepts such as white privilege - it's new. I think in the States, people have been talking about it for a long time, but here it's kind of like what is this? People are starting to use these concepts or they're more discussed in the greater society and social media. Because I remember coming from BC and was like, "Yeah, there's white privilege and this and that," and people would look at me like, "What are you talking about? Because it wasn't discussed about here." And then there was (I can't remember what happened) I think also everywhere in the world, the whole incident with George Floyd then, really triggered those conversations in Quebec, in Montreal, which people didn't talk about.

LX: Right.

VP: Right? And that's why I never heard about it in undergrad. But also, I think it was the first minister of Quebec goes, oh there's (what do you say? I'm trying to translate from French) something to the effect "There's no racism here in Quebec." Which fully minimizes every person of colour's experience. It's almost kind of like, oh yeah, over there in the States, they're crazy. Look, they killed this black man, and this is not happening here, but that's not true.

LX: Right.

VP: And also, a lot of the white population in Quebec, also, or because, it's so covert, are also trained to believe that it doesn't exist. Because of course, with the people who are white, they're saying it doesn't exist because they don't realize they have the white privilege. They can't understand what's happening to marginalized communities. It was a big shift going into the United States.

Where the concepts of race and ethnicity are completely different and there's this really huge history of racial tensions, especially between black and white people because of its history of slavery and [the] civil war, civil rights, and all of that, that we didn't have in Quebec. In Quebec even though there's a tiny history of slavery, but it's not as extensive. It's very, very tiny and it's much more a history of immigration and it's so much more recent than people looking at the states. There's always tension, there's this, there's that. But I think in the United States, even though it's still covert, but it's much more in your face than it is in Montreal.

LX: Right.

VP: So, moving to Boston, I was really exposed to all these things that really further opened up

my eyes and made me more acutely aware as a black person that I didn't experience in Montreal. Because also in Montreal, even as child of an immigrant, you're identified by your ethnicity. So, nobody's going to be like, "Oh, African American, Asian-American." We don't talk about it this way. We'll say, "This person's Japanese, Chinese, Asian," you know, all of that. And the tensions, at least in Quebec, is not between Black and white. It's between immigrants and non-immigrants.

LX: Gotcha.

VP: Meaning, immigrants of color and French Canadians, [specifically] white French Canadians. There's much more tension there, whereas in the States, I feel like, yes, it could be white Americans versus People of Color, but I think much more so because of the history of slavery and all of that. The conversation ends up much more about the tension between Black and white people.

LX: Yeah, I'm listening to all this, and I know that you do a lot of work on like racial trauma, on Haitian immigrants, and youth, and children, and families as well as HIV work. I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about how you integrated that into your work. And if you could tell me a little bit about the trajectory of your career this far, having integrated those social justice values and having built all those realizations throughout the years. How have you worked that into your career interests?

VP: Oh, in so many ways. Upon taking the multicultural class as a master's student, and then, during my doctoral program taking more classes where we integrate the multicultural lens and made sure that we were critically thinking about theories, about interventions, and using the lens of is it culturally relevant? What are the theories or interventions, limitations in terms of whether it's culturally relevant or not, and who develops these theories and how were they culturally biased? Which I found always fascinating and then finding ways to implement culturally relevant interventions or a different way than which I've been trained. Like, okay, don't use certain surveys that are not the norm on a multicultural population. Be very intentional in using surveys and interventions that serves the population or that speaks to the culture of the population that you are serving. I really absorb that, cause again, I'm so passionate about that. And how it translated into my work and how I applied it...in my doc[torate program] I told you about how I use some of the opportunities in my master's program. So, in my doctoral program, at the time, there was a professor who's also Haitian American. She had a research lab and I immediately joined it because she was focusing on expanding knowledge and understanding about mental health in the Haitian culture, and how to best serve the Haitian population in terms of the mental health in a culturally relevant way.

And I learned a lot from this professor, did some research with her, presented at different

conferences. Which to me was really exciting. It's like, how I'm contributing to helping Haitian people are going to be better served, and served in a way that is culturally relevant and affirming their culture. And that leads to really positive outcomes in terms of their mental health. So that was one way. And then after that, (I'm just trying to think about my doctoral program journey). I also did a practicum at the Haitian Mental Health Clinic of Cambridge Health Alliance where I particularly served the Haitian population, and learned a lot about that as well, and wanting to feel like I'm contributing to people from my own community, and learning a lot from that.

And then I think now that I think about it, aside from doing a practicum at the Boston University's counseling center, in which I didn't serve just predominantly in marginalized communities, but a little bit of everything. Anything after that, it was working on the Haitian Mental Health Clinic. And then my pre-doctoral practicum I did at Boston University's Center for Multicultural Training in Psychology. Their mission is to serve underserved populations, marginalized populations, either in inpatient setting or outpatient settings. So, through that I worked in inpatient setting in a psychiatric hospital. I also worked at an after-school program that predominantly served kids who are HIV positive from birth, which were predominantly kids of color.

And so, learning a lot about the intersection of physical illness and mental illness and then trauma as well and being for marginalized communities and not having access to resources and explaining all of that. So, I learned a lot through [that], and learning also about working with kids, doing group therapy, doing play therapy, but understanding how all these contextual factors made those kids more vulnerable to either mental health or even more vulnerable to the HIV diagnosis. And so, I would say from these experiences, I would definitely apply some of what I've learned but I'm also learning much more. It further informed my understanding of the feminist approach, multiculturalism, and I could also see how I could apply these things.

And so, then upon graduating from BC with my PhD, the things I think I was very intentional and things that I did so, because I had been trained by this Haitian professor to present at different conferences and things like that, I continued to partake in things that would serve the Haitian community. So, for example, the earthquake in Haiti happened in 2010. After the earthquake, in Boston, there was like- we created this, it's called the Haitian Mental Health Network, that, consists of many Haitian social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and really the mission was to expand, especially providers, understanding about the Haitian culture and how the culture then impacts the way in which symptoms of mental disorders are manifested.

What are the most culturally sensitive and relevant interventions to use with the Haitian population? And so, we would do some training, and I did some of those training either about, hey, this is what you should know about the Haitian culture when you're interacting with the Haitian patients. Hey, these are the best approaches, the best practices. So, I did a lot of that.

Even went to Haiti with the Haitian Mental Health Network to provide psychological first aid after the earthquake happened. Post PhD, I did a post-doctoral fellowship at Children's Hospital in their outpatient (not outpatient how do you call that? I'm forgetting)...But it's a program at Children's Hospital that partnered with different Boston Public Schools and send their Boston Children's Hospital clinicians to different schools to provide an array of services that meet the needs of the school.

And the array of services ranges from individual therapy, group therapy, consultation teachers, administrators, crisis intervention, case management, professional development workshops for teachers and things like that. That's when I began my journey to specialize in child and adolescent psychology and more specifically in school based mental health. Through that I was really exposed with kids from different backgrounds and families and I really learned to apply everything that I had learned to really provide the most culturally sensitive and relevant services to them. Now as I'm thinking about my journey, yes, I've worked at Children's Hospital for 10 years and then switched to working at Boston Latin School. And then that journey kind of opened up my own little private practice. I think I predominantly see, just coincidentally, a lot of patients of color. So, where I get to...but also, they're looking for representation. So, I end up having much more Black patients. So, I apply this through there. Also through my teaching and through the years I've been an adjunct professor, and it wasn't until 2 years ago, I became an associate professor of the practice. But I always make sure and I'm very intentional when teaching my students to increase and to drill into them critical thinking, but also to have them integrate culturally sensitive practices into their work.

So, for example, I like to use a lot of case presentations, or case studies I should say, I always try to make sure that at least one or two case studies, [where] the main patient is a patient of color so that they can practice this, and I will challenge them as well. So, I do it through my teaching, through my work, either at Boston Latin School, or through my private practice. And also, I would say, throughout the years sometimes people have solicited trainings, because I've done through Children's Hospital two trainings on adolescent depression. So, to the training group, I will always make sure to say that symptoms of depression can be manifested in these ways in different cultures, so be careful. Be mindful when working in families of color, about this, this, this and that. I have also done then a lot of presentations, again still about the Haitian culture. Especially in schools, it would be school staff, for them to understand Haitian culture to understand manifestation of different symptoms in kids in the classroom, how to support kids coming from a Haitian background and Haitian families, I've done a lot of that.

And since the pandemic, I shouldn't have been surprised, but I was really surprised where I was solicited for training on racial trauma, how to heal from racial trauma, so I've done a lot of those. And talking about racial health disparities, health disparities between marginalized populations and patriarchal white society and what's underneath that. And then also did a lot of training on -

oh, and more recently, I've been solicited by lawyers as a cultural expert. So, where they have Haitian clients. Haitian clients who have, by the legal system or the police system have been mistreated. There's been a lot of implicit biases. So, where they want to get my expertise on the many culturally relevant, and insensitive ways these patients have been wrongly accused or treated.

For example, they get to the police station there's no interpreter, or there's no taking into account, like, "Maybe this person behavior has more to do with the fact that they have a low acculturation, the fact that back in their countries like that's things were done a certain way and they have not integrated how things are done in this country." So, I think these are the ways in my current career and life that I try to contribute to reducing the racial disparities.

LX: I see. So, what I'm hearing is you integrate them in all aspects of you. I'm hearing that cultural competence is a huge part of what you do. That's something in a lot of your work. I also know that from when I was reading your CV, it seems awareness is also a big part of it, cultivating awareness in various aspects. I know that you've done a lot of awareness on depression and suicide. Could you tell me a little bit more about that? For example, I think it was the break free from depression project that you worked on, and you spearheaded.

VP: Yes, I can talk to you. Lucy, as you're telling me this, I'm remembering that I didn't send you my most updated CV. Which I will do.

LX: Oh no, you're good.

VP: Do you want me to send it to you right now?

LX: Sure.

VP: It's so funny that you bring the depression awareness because sometimes I forget what I do and I'm like, "Oh right, right." So, when I was at Children's Hospital, not only did I, work in- they would send me to Boston Public Schools to provide an array of services and through that, I worked at two K through 8 schools. And then also worked at Boston Latin School, which is kind of how I then landed the role that I'm in at Boston Latin School. But as another part of my job there, they asked me if I wanted to join another psychologist who was working on a depression prevention curriculum. And I was like, "Yeah, sure, absolutely." She was in the beginning stages of writing that curriculum.

When I joined, I helped to continue co-creating that curriculum. Basically, this curriculum is a curriculum that you teach in classes. It consists of 4 modules, and what's covered it's really a tool to help adolescents to increase their knowledge and awareness about symptoms

of depression, about risk factors that make people vulnerable to depression so that they could have the tools to be able to recognize whether they are at risk of developing depression or whether they have a friend who is at risk. Also, the curriculum offered a lot of information about if you feel that you could be vulnerable to this then this is how you could help yourself. These are the resources that are available to you; this is how you could help a friend. We even cover, different coping strategies that you can use so that your current [emotional state], let's say, being overwhelmed with stress doesn't elevate to depression. Talking about, "How do I approach a friend for whom I am very concerned about their emotional state?" and things like that.

It's consisted of four modules. The first module was like pure psychoeducation about signs & symptoms of depression. What are the risk factors that make people vulnerable to depression? The second module, we created a documentary to train real adolescents who are talking about their experiences with depression. And, some of the risk factors that they have. And then what's really great about the documentary is that it ends on a positive or hopeful note. Not only do they talk about their struggles or symptoms, but they [also] talk about how they've been able to find coping skills or strategies to help them navigate their symptoms. They also some of them also talk about their suicidal attempts or ideation and kind of how they help with that. What's great about the documentary is that it really pulls at your heartstrings. It's big picture, it's not actors, it's real adolescents. That's the second module. And then the third module, we did case vignettes based on the different students in the documentary so that we could have [students] integrate the knowledge that they learn in module one to some of the case vignettes of the documentary. And then, the fourth module really talks about how to help a friend, how to approach a friend, resources for themselves, [and] coping skills. Through that, I learned tons. It really further cemented my understanding and conceptualization about depression. And the other thing that I would do as well is that we of course had to pilot these interventions. So, we would train teaching staff at different schools about the whole curriculum and how to implement it.

Cause ideally, our thing was maybe [this] could be taught in health classes in different high schools and things like that. And for that we needed to not only train the teachers who are going to actually facilitate this curriculum but also talk to the team at the school who was going to implement this program. There's things like how do you prepare your school for this program? After each module, because it could potentially trigger some kids, you got to make sure that you have support services in place. And how do you identify the kids that are triggered but also how do you inform? We had a letter prepared that they could send to parents with a passive consent so that parents could opt out. Who's going to be your support [personnel] who is going to check in with these kids that are triggered?

And what do you do with the kids for whom the parents don't want them to participate in the program? You know, all these things. So, I did tons of training in different schools, for that and, now at Boston Latin school, this program is being implemented. I am helping with that as well. I

really am very grateful to Children's Hospital for so many things like providing me with quality training in terms of child adolescent depression, but also having this experience of having this experience of having co-created this adolescent depression prevention & awareness [curriculum], but also because I've been, but also further sharpening my presentation abilities cause I presented about this curriculum but also did a lot of professional development about adolescent depression [workshops] that it's just, it was very fulfilling. But also like I said, that really cemented my understanding of depression. I really enjoyed that. I still do it and some maybe in smaller ways when I do psychoeducation with some teachers that I'm consulting with or guidance counselors even with my own students at BC.

LX: I see. I know you do a lot of work with youth and adolescents in this program, and I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about what you find really rewarding about working with youth and adolescence as well as what you find challenging about it.

VP: I have been working with youth since I started. Well, actually since...more formally, since my post-doctoral fellowship...that's not true, sorry. Since a pre-doctoral internship where I worked in the after-school program with the kids. I think that was 2004, I believe 20 years (my god, I'm so old). That's where I started my journey, but I would also say, when I moved to Boston to make ends meet, I would do a lot of babysitting as well. That became my journey with getting more experiences working with kids. What I find rewarding about working with kids and adolescents is I find kids to be, and adolescents, to be very authentic and very real and I appreciate that. Where what you see is what you get, but also, they keep you on your toes.

The other very rewarding things is that they're very playful for the most part but also there's never a dull moment. It can be very joyful. I'm not, I'm never afraid to be myself with kids because they don't judge; they accept you as you are but also will call you on your stuff. And it also requires so much, clinically, so much creativity, especially the younger ones because the straight talk therapy does not work, and it depends on the kids. So, you have to find creative ways to do some psychoeducation and creative ways for some interventions like connecting with them, even establishing rapport through really relating to their world and connecting.

I learned so much from kids and sometimes I feel like maybe I'm more comfortable with kids than I am with adults. Because it's safer in a way; because they're so truthful and forthcoming. Then, what I find challenging about working with kids and adolescents has more to do again with adults. I think the challenge for me is I know that I'm going to put in my 100% effort to help that child and support that child. But working with kids, what's challenging is that the bulk of working with kids consists of working with the systems around the child or the adolescent, and sometimes the systems are not necessarily either in agreement or capable of aligning or putting in the effort that aligns with what you're trying to do as a clinician.

So sometimes, it's the parental system who either is too mentally ill to be able to reinforce what you're doing in therapy, or the parental system doesn't believe in therapy and has a stigma about mental health, so they're not going to partake in anything. Or sometimes they think, "Who are you to tell me to change certain things?" Or, they're in denial about it. And sometimes it's the medical system, because of all the cracks in the system that doesn't support the work that you do. Especially since the pandemic because the mental health needs have surged, and the system is unable to meet the needs and cracks. So, what happens is I have many cases where the child would clearly extremely benefit from medication and then, it's all the side and there's not enough systemically. There's not enough child and adolescent psychiatrist to start with. Then you add the surge in demand. And so, if you were to, for example, refer a child right now to the outpatient psychiatry at Children's Hospital, [it's a] minimum four/five months waitlist. How is the kid supposed to improve in the meantime? And then the other kind of really frustrating thing is that there are some psychiatrists, child psychiatrists, who are available, but they are in private practice, and they don't take health insurance, and their fees are too high. It's either you have to break your bank and just go with a psychiatrist who has private practice but doesn't take health insurance, or you just have to wait and wait and wait. So that's what I find extremely challenging working with kids. It's like having to deal with the systems who are not always aligned with the work that you're trying to do for the kid to get the best outcomes.

LX: I guess navigating wanting to do all this work but also knowing that...I imagine that there's a sense of powerlessness too when working with kids because of so many external factors that you have to account for or bear.

VP: Yes, and that's all-that's why I always tell my grad students, that, to not burn out in this profession and to not be discouraged, you have to, you have to focus on what you can control. Because if you focus on what you cannot control, you can be like, "I'm out," you know? And so, I just always remind myself that as a form of self-care too, that I am going to focus on what I have power on.

LX: Right.

VP: Like if the kid is in my office, is going to learn some coping skills but can't readily have access to antidepressants, or the parents are still emotionally distant for whatever reason, or sometimes the other system could be the school...not the school, I would say the teachers. If that kid has a teacher who is not psychologically minded who also were also competing against the mental health stigma that either parents or teachers or the system may have, right? And so, I find that it then becomes exhausting if I'm only focusing on that. So, I have to focus on, like, this is where I have power. This is where I have an impact. And I need to accept that I can only do so much. Which doesn't mean I won't try to advocate for my kids with the parents, but at some

point, the parents were like, “No.” They can't. Then, I need to let it go.

And in terms of the system, I will try to connect with people in my network. Be like, “Do you know if somebody has any availability and try to maybe connect the family to a psychiatrist who, instead of having a 5 month wait, there's 2 months wait?” or something. And then I'll have conversation with teachers. I will definitely try my best, but I've learned that all I can do is try my best but that ultimately there's a lot of variables that I don't have control over.

LX: I see. So, focusing on what you can control and also like the tangible things this even if they're small, like the tangible things that you can do to kind of help. Honestly, that was actually one of the questions in the in the interview protocol that you [answered]: What advice would you give to other feminist and activists entering psychology?

VP: Yes, I think it's especially people who it's interesting because some of my patients in my private practice, I can think of two right now who are acutely aware of iniquities and injustices and who are very gung-ho activists, which is great. But what happens is that they don't realize that the fact that they're acutely aware about all these issues, right? And they're very social justice oriented, they're very racially aware. I think they hit a wall where they're so disappointed because they don't realize that most people are not as acutely aware as they are, right? It's about managing their expectations, but also, that ultimately, when they try to focus on what they don't have control over, because it can be overwhelming. Just like, “Okay, right now, what is the state of the world?” There's so many still ongoing microaggressions, racial discrimination, there's wars, there's implicit bias, there's all of that, right?

LX: Okay.

VP: And if we go in there thinking it's about really managing your expectations, like it's going to continue, however, I need to look at what can I do with my skills, my talent, and within my capacity that's under my control because that's all I can control. I'm thinking about one patient that she would get very, very dysregulated every time. There was a war every time. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have feelings for it because her feelings are valid. But at the same time, it doesn't serve us if we get so dysregulated that we don't function.

Again, claiming not everybody is, able to control their dysregulation, especially if they are experiencing mental health[problems], but what I mean by that is in a particular case, we have to make more effort to be like, “Okay let's emote, absolutely. Let's feel the anger and the frustration, the devastation and everything else, but once we go through those emotions, let's see what can I do? Even the little that I do can make a difference.” If everybody does a little, then it becomes a big thing, right? And what are the ways - and I ask my client to think about like, “What are the ways in which you want to make a change?” And I always gave my example, like

the way in which I know that I can make a change is how I train my own students, is how I maybe keep (or try because that it's hard because we're also busy) to keep myself updated on the most culturally sound interventions or relevant interventions or scales or whatever it is, right? How can I train more people? That's the way that I've decided to make a difference or if I'm having conversations with friends or peers and they see something that I feel that could be a microaggression, I will bring that up. So that's the way I have decided, and I was encouraging my patients, "You have to find a way. What's your way? Is it that you're going to study and, work for the government and work at the policy level, cause that's how also that you can make a change." But ultimately, it would be wrong of me to say, "Oh yeah, you can stop the war." But there are ways that we can work towards stopping the war. But you have to be in certain position to do that, or to help towards that. Right?

So that would be my advice. What can you do and what way do you want to make a change? And in terms of improving social justice and reducing racial and inequities and inequities. And injustices and in managing your expectation that ultimately, there's something there's so much bigger than us, but let's focus on what we can do, the little things that we can do.

LX: Right. What I'm hearing is figuring helping students channel all those emotions and to productive ways where they can change those things.

VP: Yes, yes. Yes, and I always tell this patient, it's like, "Okay, well, yeah, lets channel this anger towards something that you can do." After I allow her, of course, to process her emotions. (Laughs)

LX: Yes. Yeah, I think I also I also read that I think there was a quote that you said on one of the Boston College pages which is, "My approach is to provide students with the best tools I was given while enabling them to be the most culturally competent, sensitive clinicians they can be." It was really interesting, and I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the role of mentorship. What was the mentorship that you were given? Or when, you were a PhD student or when you were in school? And I was also, kind of, I'm also interested in knowing a little bit about like what role you see as a mentor to students, and to like budding practitioners?

VP: I was very fortunate upon landing at Boston College. Like Boston College, I could talk for hours in terms of the many, many, many, many, many, gifts that Boston College has given me. Which is why, after almost 25 years of being in Boston, I am still connected to Boston College. I was a student there and adjunct faculty there and now faculty there. Like I never left it, in a sense, because it's been so good to me and it's contributed to who I am, [and] a big part of who I am today, and who I am as a professional, and I'm so eternally grateful to BC and BC's community. Now with that being said...I'm trying to remember your question. Oh my god. (Laughs)

LX: So, I want to know a bit about-

VP: Oh yes, mentorship! Sorry, okay. So, I knew that was an interest of what I wanted to say and then I lost track. Yeah so, speaking of becoming more aware of certain things in terms of, yes, Montreal has more than a share of issues. It dawned on me...so upon entering the doctoral, yeah, master's and doctoral program that it was the first time that I was having teachers that were black. In Montreal, I've never had a teacher of color, period. And so, here I was at BC and my advisor was Black. And two of my professors were black and I was just astonished. I was beyond excited, and as you all know, representation matters.

With each of these Black professors, they all became my mentors to this day. I learned a lot from them, and I learned also a lot about the importance of mentorship. And I've always been a person's [who's] like, "I'm going to give back what I was given." And so, I saw and continue to see the impacts it had on my life, especially my professional life, and not to the same extent my personal life as well. And so, I was like, "No, I want to be that person for my students."

And so, as a professor, I always make myself [inaudible]. I'm always here for you guys if you want any advice on your professional journey or whatever it is. Some students take me up on it, and they're still connected to me even after having graduated. I try to give that, now that I'm faculty, to my student advisees. Although I wish I could see them more often, but it's not always possible because all of our schedules are crazy.

But I think in my mentorship, it's really kind of making them feel understood and seen but also giving them the ropes. And helping them manage their expectations, but also kind of giving them advice, and pearls of wisdom that I was able to gather based on my own experiences, that I can actually transmit to them so that they can make the best decision choices for themselves. So that they don't have to make the same mistakes that I've done. They can learn from my mistakes. They can learn from maybe opportunities, that at the time I didn't know, but now that I know that I can give them, absolutely.

LX: I think that also makes me think of another question that I had, which is where do you see, I guess, where do you see the future of psychology? You were talking a little bit about representation and how impactful that was, on you and your development, how much that is a priority too when you're in your own mentorship. So, I guess the question is, what inroads have feminists made in psychology and what roadblocks do you think are still there? And what still needs to be changed, or what needs-what else needs to be accomplished within the field?

VP: I think the inroads that the field has made...I think that has been further kind of expedited by the whole pandemic and the whole George Floyd situation, is that now there I think people will

give more value to providing culturally competent care I think people before would be more like, "Is it really that important?" And then you're like, "No, no. It is." But, also to see the pertinence and reality of racial trauma. So, I think it's taken more seriously it's better integrated into people's conceptualization of mental health disorders and people considering that into their treatment goals and interventions. I think it shed light on the importance of reducing, finding ways to reduce, but also to understand the impact of implicit bias and how to reduce it.

I think in that way, all of that has been expedited and there's much more conversations about it. I think in anything we've seen, in different ways, now there's more representation across the board in different fields. And there's more efforts toward that, although I hope it's not going to die down now, but it's like, "Oh, this happened," and then now we're back to our regular. This is where I've seen the changes and it's part of the conversations, and that it's part of the conversation when people will talk about things like microaggressions, or you can see, for example, in, HR trainings and things like that. So, that's how I see the field has shifted. Of course we have ways to go.

(And oh, the other thing where I see ways to go.) But also seeing changes even at BC, for example, that we have much more diverse cohorts of students, right? Then there's more effort to outreach to marginalized populations, in order for them to apply to the field because part of the field too, is to make the field more culturally sensitive and relevant. It's also to increase representation, having access to an array of providers of colors so that the population of color can also then have more options in terms of who they have as a therapist.

And then definitely even more outreach to, populations of color to encourage them to become therapists because we need a lot of therapists of color, of different ethnicities and races, so that we can consult with colleagues about [cultural differences and] then, become cultural experts so then we can provide the best services that meet, not only the emotional mental health needs, but the cultural needs of the population that we are serving. I always wish that (this is a wish of mine), even in graduate programs that there's more talk, even more talking, beyond that multicultural class, right?

And that there's more tools given, right? That there's more research that is more culturally mindful, especially when we're talking about the construction of certain scales or surveys. In terms of the population upon which you norm your scale. That has to be much more diverse, and when doing research in general that the population you sample, is more representative of the population in the United States, it's more diverse. Because then again, how relevant are your findings if 90% of your sample is white, American individuals? So that needs to be improved. I also think that in terms of getting licensed, that there should be...I know the license thing exam, especially for the E triple P [EPPP; Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology], there's some questions about multiculturalism. But I think they should be more in depth. Like. that

should be better tested so that it can kind of screen out the people who are not culturally relevant in their approaches. More in depth questions, if I had my way. I also think when interviewing people for different positions, there should be questions about that. It should be part of your evaluation as a therapist, psychologist, all of that.

But I think the crux of it all is to really improve ways in which research is being done about different interventions, about different things. That people are more culturally minded in terms of their approaches and their research methodologies. And I think the other aspect in the field overall is better training of students so that they become these professors or these psychologists who provide—who are culturally- acutely culturally aware and provide culturally relevant services as well. So yeah, there's still a long, long, long way to go, cause I know that in certain states, I've been told that multiculturalism is not a thing. I think they're still having that color blind approach, which is very dangerous.

LX: Right, right. We've made some steps towards cultural competency but there's still a lot more that can be done at all aspects of the field. I have a couple more questions. One of them is: You've done so much work, you've engaged in so many different projects. Which one of those accomplishments are you most proud of, and why?

VP: Oh my god, that's a tough question.

LX: Hey, you could give top three if you would like to.

VP: Wow. One that I can think of is not necessarily the top one, but just one that I can think of, more in terms of challenging myself and my own professional growth, or personal growth. So, during the pandemic so I was approached by the black professional organization of a national company in Canada, it would be the equivalent of the Verizon in the United States, and it's called Bell Canada.

LX: Okay, yes.

VP: I was approached by their Black professional organization. So, the Black, I guess, employees of that of that company have their own association, and they were like, “Okay, for Black History Month, we are looking for a speaker to talk about racial trauma, racial healing, in light of everything that's happened.” And this is a huge company, and I was like, “Oh gosh, okay.” And so, my presentation was about kind of understanding racial trauma in light of everything that has happened. What are the psychoeducation about the response, psychological response to trauma, and what is racial trauma, and how it can be manifest in terms of responses?

With trauma, it's always like I say, it's a normal response to something that's abnormal. So,

you're not the one that's abnormal, but it's the situation that makes the whole thing abnormal. And so, it makes sense that you respond this way in light of something that completely shattered your sense of safety, and so on and so forth. Then, integrating the cultural aspect into it and racism and all of that. Then, from that, understanding how trauma dysregulates one and its impact will inform the points of intervention and healing and all of that.

And so, to me, I'm proud of it because I was able to do presentations, I think, through the years of teaching and doing trainings. It was a good practice for me to be able to do that but because I'm still a shy person, which it always astounds me every day that I'm able to do a presentation or teach, but because it's still nerve racking for me. But I think I put it as one of my accomplishments that I'm proud of, because I was able to do it for a company that I grew up with that has the monopoly. It was only Bell Canada for many years. Growing up, it was only Bell Canada.

LX: Right.

VP: It's only in the past 15 years that there are other companies. So, to be asked by such a prominent company to give a talk, but also it's a Canadian company and to be able to talk about this topic where I found, "Oh wow, I've reached a level" that I have this understanding. By no means am I like the best or whatever, but I have enough understanding and knowledge and experience that I can speak about that. Because sometimes I would see, "Oh, this is cool, this speaker is talking about that," and then to realize, "Oh, this speaker is going to be me." And having a little bit of imposter syndrome too. Just like, "Oh, why me?" And then being able to deliver it to a big audience. It was a webinar, and it was well received and so that really felt very rewarding. Because I was like, "Oh my god, what if they don't like it? What if I choke? What if I, you know?" All the anxiety that comes with it, but I was able to challenge myself, overcome that challenge, but also do something that would make the Black employees of this company feel seen and feel validated and giving them tools also to navigate their own racial trauma. But also, for the white people in the audience to further understand what their colleagues might have been going through, or continue to go through.

I think that's one thing. What other thing am I proud of? I think I'm also proud of having been able to teach all these years, I think it's been 18 years? (Oh my gosh, anyway). It's been 18 years, out of those 18, I would say, 14 years of adjunct teaching and then 4 years now of being faculty. And just being able to grow as a professor to really, as they say, "Practice makes perfect" more in the sense that I've been able to become better and better, and connecting with my students, and really feeling like I've made a difference in terms of their own training and not having given up. Where sometimes in the beginning as a teacher you make little mistakes here and there and not being discouraged. Hanging in there and continuing that journey. That's what I'm very proud of.

And then I would say, just in my work in general, with a lot of the kids that I've been very privileged to work with. And I learned so much from these kids. It's humbling, because, you go into it, and it's like "I'm going to help these kids. I'm going to do this." I know I have helped a lot of kids, but they also have helped me, and, through their journeys and their own resilience. I feel like I always learn from [them. It] doesn't matter what child I work with and doesn't matter what their presenting concerns are, but they all have strengths that have inspired me that I can look back. It's funny; I'm home in Montreal right now, and I was just sharing this story with my mom before jumping onto the zoom. I was like, "Yeah, there's this kid where the kid was so inspiring." And I'm like, "Wow." This is where you're humbled. You can learn not only from adults and colleagues, but you can learn a lot from kids.

LX: Yes.

VP: And so, I'm very proud of the work that I've done with a lot of the children that have come across my path.

LX: Yeah. Seeing the growth throughout your career, like with your talk with Bell for example, which is a massive company. It's all these parts and points of growth throughout your career and your education, your own personal growth, it all culminated in a way where you made the impact that you wanted to make. And also, being able to work with children and seeing the growth. And being able to learn from children.

VP: Yeah, I think who I have become as a career person is so much bigger than I would have imagined. I always tell my students that I thought I was going to be...when I was I'd say 20 or whatever, I was like, "I'm going to be a physician. That's it." I definitely didn't think I would be a professor, didn't think I would do presentations and things, oh no.

LX: Right.

VP: So, I am very proud of it, I'm very happy about it, and I think for me being this kid who is still an introvert, and still shy, to have been able to overcome that and still be able to do these things.

LX: Right. Oh, that feels so inspiring.

VP: Thank you.

LX: Are you okay to go until 12 or do you need...

VP: What time is it right now? Yeah, yeah.

LX: Okay, so the last question that I have is, I think you alluded to this earlier when you were talking about the importance of self-care when it comes to burn out. I'm kind of pivoting a little bit backwards. But, how do you navigate personal and professional demands within your life? I know that there's definitely so much that I'm sure that you're balancing, and I wanted to know how you navigate that.

VP: No, that's an excellent question. I think the way that I am, my DNA, the way that I'm wired- The way I am is I am very thankful for it, which is that I do work hard, but I've known from very early on, or ever since I can remember, that I cannot function if I don't have downtime. I think self-care has always been part of my journey, very organically and naturally, because I know that I cannot function. So, I will go full steam, but there will always be this moment where I take time for myself. So what I do and what I've observed about myself then to being a grad student doing, going through the very challenging journey of doing a PhD and all of that is that I always make sure either consciously or unconsciously to integrate self-care into my daily life. Or sometimes if I was not able to do it daily, at least during the weekend I would do something.

And so, for me it looks like definitely doing something that allows me to an escape, like a distraction or something, engaging in even the most trivial things that bring me joy. So, on days that are very busy, where I don't have the time, it could be music [which] definitely soothes me. Or, watching...I was telling this to my student too, like watching *My Great Escape*. And I was like, "Don't judge." It's like, watching entertainment news, that is my thing. And it just brings me a lot of joy and a distraction.

And I think it's about also knowing yourself. I know what we charge my battery. I know who I am. Some people are like, "Did you watch this show or that show?" I know I cannot watch any television that is going to be stressful. And I tell my friends, I don't care if you judge me; I only watch comedy. Or, if it's like a dramedy, there's a little bit of drama but with a comedic edge. Don't ask me to watch anything that's remotely stressful because I feel like my job is already stressful, or the stories of my patients is already a lot. And now you want me to [watch stressful television]? That's not what recharges me. My comedy recharges me. Anything that makes me laugh that really provides an escape.

Sometimes I'll watch things, even shows for teenagers and love, things like that. So that's when I don't have time, but also, I think since I became a grad student then, I also integrated physical activity, so and I've been able to upkeep it where I work out in the mornings and that really, I really need that to kick in endorphins, to start my day right. And I've been able to upkeep it. The very few times and that does not happen at all, where I don't work out in the morning it's either because I'm away on vacation or I'm sick, or inadvertently I ended up over-sleeping where I'm like, "Darn, I don't have time to go to the gym. I have to go to work." But otherwise, but I do feel

a difference in those very rare mornings where I don't work out. It becomes this thing where it's my routine. Not only is it good for my health, but it's also good to release emotions, release a lot of things. And so that's what I do on a daily basis.

And then, my practice right now is I'll go full steam Monday to Friday, but I don't see any patients during the weekend. The only work that I do during the weekend that I don't have a choice sometimes is grading. But other than that, I take my weekends to sleep in or to do things that bring me joy like connecting with friends because I don't have time necessarily to connect with friends during the week.

And also, the other thing that I love is, I'm a foodie. You know, exploring a new restaurant I love going to brunch. I will make sure to do those things and connect with people, and if it's beautiful outside like take a walk outside in the sun. I live very close to the ocean. Also, the ocean brings me joy. I always make sure that on Sundays I walk by the ocean with my dog. It's just little mundane things, right? I always tell my students, "You need to make sure that you get to know yourself and you get to know what brings you joy."

LX: Yeah.

VP: So that you can do that. You can do these little things on an everyday basis because to me that's what recharges my batteries. Otherwise, you burn out...you're just miserable, and I refuse to be miserable, so that's what I do.

LX: Knowing what brings you joy and being really intentional about establishing that in your life because that's what you need to continue doing the work that you're doing. I think that sums up all of my questions. This was an incredibly insightful and thoughtful interview. I was also wondering if there was anything else that we did not touch upon that you wanted me to know about yourself things like your career, your work within psychology, your personal life, anything else that you would like to share.

VP: I'm trying to think. I don't know. I feel like I have been talking non-stop, but I'm glad that you find it to be helpful. Because I don't necessarily view myself as though...sometimes, I'm just talking I don't know if it's [helpful] hopefully. I'm glad to hear that it's helpful and insightful.

LX: I think you answered every question so thoughtfully and I'm like, "Wow."

VP: Oh good, yes! (Laughs) Anything else about me? So let me see, we talked about my teaching, we talked about my presentations and my work at school with the kids, a little bit about my upbringing.

LX: Your goals within psychology and your mission. Yeah.

VP: I think the other thing I would add, which I've already spoken to it. But, in terms of my upbringing, I really give mad props, as they say, to my parents, to be really honest. In terms of who I am today and [being] proud of my racial, cultural, ethnic heritage and feeling very comfortable in that, but also being very racially aware that all goes to my parents. But I always tell my parents, and I've thanked them like a couple of years ago now that I'm an adult, but there's certain things when I was little that I didn't...growing up as a child of immigrant parents...that I didn't necessarily understand, which were at the time as a kid annoying to me.

Things such as, and kudos to my parents again that they didn't, in their dynamic as parents, didn't let my own complaints or my siblings' complaints get in the way of that. So, my mom would put me in these Haitian Dance classes, which as a kid I didn't like. It was this Afro-Haitian dance class and I was just like, "Oh my god," and I think at that time you just this kid who's going to school in a French-Canadian system. You come back home, very much like you just want to be like the other kids and it's just like, I don't see why I have to do this, but because my parents are very strict, I knew I could complain to my other peers who are also children of immigrants, but I knew I couldn't say anything to my parents.

And then my mom being a retired teacher. Speaking of social justice and kind of the exposure that I got to that in terms of how my parents carried themselves and also how they always asserted themselves. They were very proud of who they were and in their own navigation of racism and discrimination, it was always like, "You do this strategy, that strategy" and then they were never deterred nor discourage, and they stood up for themselves.

But the other thing I've known between the Afro-Haitian dance classes is that my mom, to me as an adult now, is like, "Wow, Mom, that was so major in terms of doing things in the community." She would for, I think 4 or 5 years in a row, rent this space, and would create this Halloween party for children of Haitian immigrants, who were mostly children of her friends and things like that, and she hired a DJ.

There was a \$5 cover charge to help her with the expenses, and she would put on a show. Which, that's the other part I didn't like either. Her show featured her children, and first nieces and nephews. And if it was Halloween, then she would say, "Oh, well, we don't have Halloween in Haiti, but here are some things through performing that you should know about the culture, or about the dance or about (how do you call that in English) tales, like cultural stories blah blah" that we, her kids, would have to reenact as a show.

I was annoyed by that sometimes. But now looking back, that's pretty amazing that she offered that to this Haitian community and that was her way of "Let's make sure that the culture is still

alive, and let's make sure that we provide a space for these Haitian kids to, again, representation, to not feel alone in the sea of when they go to school" [where] the majority of the kids in their classrooms are white, right? And you can make friends through that as well. She did that for I think 4 years in a row. And so now as an adult, I'm like, "Thank you so much, Mom," because even the Afro-Haitian...So the irony is that in Boston there is also a big Haitian community. There's this Haitian dance instructor in Cambridge. In Central Square, there's the dance complex, and he offers Haitian dance classes. I take those classes as a way of self-care as well. I know all the moves because of my mom, and she put me in those classes when I was little and now it's actually fun for me.

LX: Right, right. Yeah.

VP: And I get it and I understand it. As kids, of course you don't get it, you don't understand, but now as an adult I'm eternally grateful to my mom for that. And that really cemented like my own identity versus when I meet other Haitian people my age, who didn't have that.

LX: Right. Especially because that's such a big part of even your work now. It's really laid the-

VP: And it informs like how I can also consult with immigrant parents in terms of best way to instill their culture into their kids, and upkeep it as well. Cause I've seen [it], I'm the product of what has worked well.

LX: Yes, yes. Right. So, they were kind of the OGs. You're leaving the same impact on others that your parents left on you.

VP: Yes, because I definitely learned a lot from my parents and I was able, cause I'm the oldest of four but also impart that in some of my siblings, especially my youngest sibling because we're four. But the three of us that are the oldest were more or less the same age. So, there's Steve four years after me, there's my brother a year after my brother and sister. And then, 12 years after that my sister, there's another sister. So, there's a 17-year age gap between myself and the youngest one. And so, I was able to also help in her upbringing. Yeah.

LX: Hmm, I see. Wow. And you talked about growth too and that's the epitome of that.

VP: It came back full circle where I know exactly, in a different way I'm not her mom but, I'm your sister, but I'm also a mom at the same time all mixed together. But she was able to receive that from my parents very much so, but I think what I was myself and my other siblings who are older than her), were able to give her is just more understanding, because we grew up in the same way that she grew up. Does that make sense? In terms of navigating the Haitian world with the French-Canadian world, there's just things that we could also share pearls of wisdom as well, in

terms of how to reconcile both of these worlds.

LX: Great. I think that brings us to the end of our interview. Thank you so much.

VP: You're very welcome.

LX: I am going to stop recording.

End of recording

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