From the Editor’s Desk

As a new member to the School and the newly elected Director of the Institute, I felt great honor to carry on the tradition of publishing the Multicultural Voices. To many of our friends who have been supporting our Institute, we would like to dedicate this new issue to them.

In this issue, we chose to focus on the Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice published by the National Associations of Social Workers. After more than two decades of discussion, cultural competence approach has become a commonly accepted way of working with people from a different culture in almost all health and human services. The publication of the Standard signifies a formal endorsement of the social work profession to this approach in this country. A group of Master of Social Work year one students from our School was invited to solicit feedback on the Standard from the practitioners and students. The students were given the full autonomy to work on this project. The materials and the viewpoints are theirs; however, their efforts and achievement are appreciated by the Institute.

There is a great tradition of the Multicultural Voices to publish our students’ expression of their own identity. Cultural awareness is a foundation of the cultural competence. Knowing one’s own cultural identity is critical. Nonetheless, nowadays, we cannot take an essentialist or primordial perspective on one’s identity. Our racial-ethnic cultural inheritance always intersects with our personal experience. Through the Students Voices sections, we hope to demonstrate the various possibilities of how we may define ourselves. To many of our students, their cultural identity and personal experience finally lead them to the road of becoming a professional social worker.

The members of the Institute of Multicultural Research and Social Work Practice are all volunteers. The Institute also does not have regular funding of any sources. We, however, would like to achieve as much as possible. Although we cannot guarantee a regular publication of the Multicultural Voices, this issue is surely the beginning of a series of activities of the Institute. We are currently planning for a one-day symposium on interethnic communication in human services in the coming October. Together with this symposium, we hope to publish another issue of the Multicultural Voices. If you are interested in any of these activities, please feel free to send me an email.

Miu Chung Yan, Editor
Email: mcyan@sfu.edu

The NASW’s Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity and the Standards for Cultural Competency (Part 1)

An Interview with Professor Rita Takahashi
Anne Hipskind, Jen Kenny-Baum, Sam Ferguson, Marielle Ferreboeuf, Susanna Gilbertson

The following article is based on a conversation with Professor Rita Takahashi, a tenured professor in the School of Social Work at San Francisco State University, who is currently serving on the National Association of Social Work (NASW) National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity. This Committee conceptualized and wrote for the Standards for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice (the Standards) which was approved by the NASW Board of Directors on June 23, 2001.

Professor Takahashi joined the Committee shortly after the Standards was drafted. She and all Committee members have since been working on ways to implement the standards and methods of measuring outcomes. She also testified at the Public Hearing before the California State Assembly Human Services Committee on July 12, 2002. This was one of three hearings held by the Assembly to assess the direction in which the social work profession is headed and hear recommendations for strengthening the profession. The central purpose of the hearings was to address the social worker shortage in the State of California.

Professor Takahashi, with input from the National NASW Office and its California Chapter, wrote for the Standards for Cultural Competence (Part 1). She also testified at the Public Hearing before panel on issues related to social work shortage and culturally competency in social services delivery systems.

Both the NASW and the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) have policy statements on the need for culturally competent social work education and practice. Principles have been established and best practice methods have been articulated; however, it is commonly understood that delivery on services to clients is often far from culturally competent. As Takahashi stated in her testimony, “application and implementation have been spotty at best.” The charge of the Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity was to further expand on these expectations, to make them more explicit in order to provide not only concrete standards, but detail the manner in which these standards will be implemented.
and evaluated so that practitioners and agencies can more responsibly apply, implement, and evaluate practice procedures to ensure cultural competency.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In her testimony, Takahashi, with input from the NASW, recommended establishing a statewide, community based commission to function as an organizing body through which the standards would be implemented, evaluated and regulated. This commission would reflect representation from all regions and the diversity within communities in California. Takahashi also suggested, “A starting point for such a committee would be to consider what individuals and organizations have already outlined and conceptualized with regard to cultural competency standards, and to strategically plan and decide what actions should be taken.” More specifically, the recommendation includes six objectives for such a commission:

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<th>Obj.</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pinpoint significant issues that relate to the systems’ ability to serve diverse social service needs throughout the state;</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identify cultural competency standards that must be met by all social service providers and human service agencies in the state;</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specify models, plans, and approaches to ensure culturally relevant services to diverse populations and to implement cultural competency standards statewide;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Indicate the resources needed to enhance the depth and breadth of culturally-relevant and effective human services;</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Make specific recommendations for changes and identify the means to implement them;</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Assess and monitor on-going efforts implement statewide cultural competent standards.</td>
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The second significant recommendation by Takahashi in her testimony is the allocation of resources in order to further develop and implement the standards. For example, money and other resources would go toward such things as salary increases for those agencies that meet competency standards. Multilingual social workers would receive substantially more compensation. Recruitment and outreach efforts could be strengthened through scholarships for historically underserved and under-represented populations who “would be more effective in bringing this diverse population into the profession”. Resources would also be needed for developing training and evaluation models.

CHALLENGES

Professor Takahashi believes that the testimony was well received by the State Assembly and that the recommendations put forward by the NASW would have gone much further if California were not facing such a dire economic situation. Assemblywoman Dion Aroner, Chair of the Human Services Committee, has long been a strong supporter of social work practice in California. She drafted a bill which was focused on addressing the social work shortage and issues of effective and competent human service delivery system. Although the bill did pass the Assembly, it was never signed by the Governor because of the current budget crunch. Despite the current economic climate, the NASW Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity continues to work on the standards with the goal of eventually implementing these standards across the board nationwide. Committee members have been working on the Standards to further define the measurements, goals and objectives of each standard, discover evidence for how that standard would be met and investigate the means by which this standard will be measured.

The evaluation of and responsibility to cultural competency is not an easy goal to define or achieve. Cultural Competency in an on-going process of building a knowledge base and growing in one’s own capacity for cultural competence. However, Takahashi points out, we must find a way to show accountability. While she does not like the idea of an agency or organization being “certified” as culturally competent because suggests that the learning has stopped and one “has arrived” at cultural competence, Takahashi believes that there are ways in which competency can be measured and evaluated in the name of accountability.

LOOKING FORWARD

Professor Takahashi points to other disciplines as having well-established and integrated models for evaluating and measuring cultural competency. For example, the Health Resources and Services Administration Office for Minority Health identify nine critical domains for measuring critical competency as well as specific measures for cultural competency. (For more information of HRSA study on measuring cultural competency, go to http://www.hrsa.gov/OMH/cultural/cultural.htm.)

Other practices may provide some guidance as the social work practice furthers its efforts toward delivering culturally competent services across the board on both state and national levels. The National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity is also developing training packages for the NASW to provide to agencies for the development of cultural competency. The NASW intends to provide training for cultural competency through continuing education conferences and workshops and is compiling materials for its
publications and web site that will further inform agencies and individuals about topics of cultural competency.

Professor Takahashi believes that the further development and eventual implementation of these standards will have a profound impact on both social work education and practice. She sees the NASW, the CSWE, and human service agencies as being vitally instrumental in the degree of success that can be achieved by social workers in the field. However, Professor Takahashi emphasizes the commitment of individual social workers to seek out knowledge and information that will further one’s own cultural competency. This is a life-long and constant responsibility that each one of us has a duty to pursue.

Reflections on the NASW Standards for Cultural Competency in Social Work Practice (Part 2)
Sam Ferguson, Marielle Ferreboeuf, Susanna Gilbertson, Anne Hipskind, Jen Kenny-Baum

On June 23, 2001 the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Board of Directors approved the Standards for Cultural Competency in Social Work Practice (the Standards) as prepared by the NASW National Committee on Racial and Ethnic Diversity. These Standards were based on the policy statement “Cultural Competence in the Social Work Profession” published in Social Work Speaks: NASW Policy Statements (2000) and the NASW Code of Ethics (1997). These standards are the “first attempt by the profession to delineate standards for culturally competent social workers.” (NASW Standards for Cultural Competency, 2001.)

In January 2003, MSW student members of the Multicultural Institute at San Francisco State University interviewed eight individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds who are either current MSW students or practitioners in the field. These interviews were designed to explore the Standards’ role in social work education and practice. Each of the interviewees was asked to read the full standards and was interviewed in person, via email or over the phone.

The following is a summary of these standards:

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Social Worker shall:</th>
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<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Ethics and Values</td>
<td>Function in accordance with the values, ethics, and standards of the profession, recognizing how personal and professional values may conflict with or accommodate the needs of diverse clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Self-Awareness</td>
<td>Seek to develop an understanding of their own personal, cultural, values and beliefs as one way of appreciating the importance of multicultural identities in the lives of people.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Cross-Cultural Knowledge</td>
<td>Have and continue to develop specialized knowledge and understanding about the history, traditions, values, family systems, and artistic expression of major client groups that they serve.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Cross-Cultural Skills</td>
<td>Use appropriate methodological approaches, skill, and techniques that reflect the workers’ understanding of the role of culture in the helping process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>Service Delivery</td>
<td>Be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>Empowerment and Advocacy</td>
<td>Be aware of the effect of social policies and programs on diverse client populations, advocating for and with clients whenever appropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>Diverse Workforce</td>
<td>Support and advocate for recruitment, admissions and hiring, and retention efforts in social work programs and agencies that ensure diversity within the profession.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Professional Education</td>
<td>Advocate for and participate in educational training programs that help advance cultural competence within the profession.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nine</td>
<td>Language Diversity</td>
<td>Seek to provide or advocate for the provision of information, referrals, and services in the language appropriate to the client, which may include use of interpreters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Cross-Cultural Leadership</td>
<td>Be able to communicate information about diverse groups to other professionals.</td>
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Standards are usually created to provide individuals with a common understanding or a working dialogue. Standards are often created to make systems more efficient; standards imply that existing learning can be
duplicated and applied to a new situation. Standards also suggest a level of quality and/or professionalism.

What are the implications of these standards on Social Workers? If Social Workers need these standards, how many know they exist?

Here’s what we asked our interviewees: Were you aware of the NASW Standards for Cultural Competency in Social work Practice (6/23/01) prior to this interview? If yes, how did you learn about them? If no, do you feel that not knowing has impacted your work? Half of the respondents were aware of the standards prior to our interview and half had no knowledge of the NASW standards. Of the four respondents who were aware of the standards, 3 of them knew about the standards through a class in their Master’s in Social Work program and one was made aware of the standards through workshop at the annual NASW conference.

Next, we asked our interviewees: Has your definition of cultural competency changed after reading the NASW Standards? If yes, how so? The responses varied considerably:

“No the standards haven’t changed my definition. I feel it’s always been interwoven into my practice. The basics of how each client should be treated and adding it to your differential seems essential. I think because I’m an immigrant woman, it’s [cultural awareness] always present”

“It’s interesting to know that Cultural Competency is defined as an ongoing process.”

“It’s important to have a working definition of cultural competency so that I can dialogue with other social workers.”

“I found them to be informative and an extension of how I envision cultural competency to be practiced.”

“I realize now why our school mandates that we take a class on cultural diversity. The curriculum of the class reflects the standards almost exactly.”

“Yes, it has changed them somewhat. It allowed me to apply a more concrete definition to the “standards” and “qualities” necessary to provide social work services. It has allowed me to structure my own knowledge of how and which ways I think and use the skills I have learned on the job.”

Practice
How do these standards play out in our professional practice? As students at SFSU we’re eager for ways to put into action the ideas we’re learning. How does the theoretical take shape in the field? We asked the group being interviewed:

After reading the standards, can you describe concrete examples of how individuals or agencies work towards meeting the goals articulated in the standards? Our respondents brought up a number of ideas including attending trainings and classes, community involvement, having organizations establish a community advisory board, hiring staff that represent the community the agency serves, learning another language or providing interpreters, becoming involved in communities that are different than your own, referring clients to other organizations to ensure that the services they receive are culturally appropriate, being open to new people and cultures, providing a space for race to be discussed in the workplace, and utilizing supervision as a place to discuss diversity issues.

“I think it would be more effective if trainings were paired with ongoing staff discussion about the meaning of cultural competence and how it is being used (or glossed over) by each of us. I suspect that this often does not happen due to a combination of time constraints and the work required by each social worker to address the issue thoroughly.”

“The agency has to have a commitment to Cultural Competency – not just pay lip service, but really integrate it into every aspect of their practice – through signage, printed materials, etc.”

One respondent noted that they had not seen evidence of the Standards in practice:

“I would like to, but I do not believe I have experienced ‘examples’. I have done undoing racism workshops and read articles, but within a formal agency itself there have not been any trainings or retreats regarding matters indicated in the standards.”

Education
In an attempt to find out how and what we, as social workers and students, have learned thus far in our process of becoming culturally competent, we asked our interviewees the following question:

What did you learn at school or through your internships that was useful to you in your own process of becoming culturally competent?

“Listen actively, communicate thoroughly, let go of arrogance, try to understand from another perspective (knowing that you could NEVER be someone else), don’t put your shit out there unless it’s relevant, avoid bringing it back to me and do not invalidate by doing so, and be aware of the space you are taking up.”
"Acknowledging my own difference, not pretending that I’m like the client – because I’m not – was pivotal for me."

"I learn from families all the time. I ask about their cultures, their rituals, their spirituality, to continue to learn from them and better serve them. It’s always in the forefront of my mind. I can also take that information and do some education with the staff around what they find “weird”.

"In school we had two semesters in class around racism. It was self-awareness combined with examining oppression in the U.S. Knowing that they exist, then educating on how you change the system – more examining the psychology of it – at the time, I didn’t fully appreciate it, but now, while I’m doing it [making institutional change] I really get it. I think the learning of that is not static."

"I haven’t learned much at school yet (my school’s student body is mostly white and I just started taking the diversity class so we will see what might be learned from that). In my internship, I work with very diverse populations. I am learning cultural norms for some groups, I observe family dynamics, I see how some youth are affected by racism or classism based on their ethnicity or where they come from in the city.”

"In school, my interactions with other students have been a part of the process. Hearing their personal stories in the Ethnic Cultural Concepts and Principles class – and it wasn’t planned, it happens through dialogue.”

"Being in school with a diverse student body is the best learning experience. It was very hard but I learned so much from my classmates.”

"Experiences of working with other theories surrounding culture shifts my perspective and informs my practice.”

"I think that being exposed to different people is the best way to learn about different cultures. I also don’t think I can assume that I am culturally competent just because I have been exposed to a variety of people and I am learning about culture in school. Becoming culturally competent is a never ending process in my eyes.”

"I was also made aware of how monolithic and modernist the definition of culture is in the standards. However, even though they may not be perfect philosophically or politically, they do fill a void. I feel that it is critical to openly state that cross-cultural communication takes effort and has problematic aspects especially when the social worker almost always has more power than the client. To me this sets it as our responsibility to try to level the playing field a little by helping to create or find a cross-cultural space or position that works well for both the client and the social worker.”

**Self-Evaluation**

How do we know if we are culturally competent? Can we evaluate ourselves? Who is the authority that is assessing and what is their definition of cultural competency? How do we reeducate our own selves when we think we are culturally capable? We asked our interviewees the following question: *Can agencies or individuals evaluate their own cultural competency? How so?*

"No. We need other people’s input in evaluating cultural competency. Collaboration is the key. We need to rely on others in order to grow in this area. Working with different professionals is also crucial to cultural competency. There must be checks and balances in this work.”

"No. Not on our own. We always need outside help.”

"I think they can do a combination. I think they can ask the community they serve for feedback. Barring that, I think they can set their own standards for what cultural competency is and then hire an outside person to evaluate if they’re meeting their own standards. I think if an agency set a baseline (set the bar at a certain place) then comes back in a few years to see if they’re meeting it, and then continually raises the bar.”

"Yes through surveys but it’s hard because everyone is at a different level and has their own stereotypes and bias’ towards others. To be totally culturally competent, no, I think it’s just different stages of going through that process.”

"Yes. I think that a questionnaire for the clients may be helpful in determining cultural competency. I also think that agencies can evaluate and hire employees who are committed to learning and becoming more culturally competent.”

“Certainly they can. However, I believe that someone outside the agency will be more “objective” since they may have less at stake in affirming the agency’s competence. Also, I think it would be best to have a group of people who are from different cultures to do the evaluation. In some agencies this is attainable from within, but many agencies are not so diverse. This lack of diversity will often need to be addressed. Often I have heard agencies have various excuses about their lack of diversity. I think that here too an
outside group could give agencies feedback about how to actually attain diversity rather than lament their lack of it.”

CRITIQUE

During the data analysis process, we began to develop our own critique of the Standards. We participated in a class discussion on cultural competency and read Peter Leonard’s *Postmodern Welfare*. At this point, we became aware of the lack of critical analysis of the Standards within the responses to our questions. Concurrently, we realized that responses we received reflected the limitations of the particular questions that we asked our interviewees. Due to time restraints, we were unable to go back to our respondents and interview them again with a new set of critical questions. However, this discussion would be incomplete without a critique of the Standards.

During one of our class discussions, it became apparent to us that the Standards was written for White social workers. Without addressing issues of cultural competency for social workers of color working with white clients or clients of color, the Standards implicitly assumes all social workers are the same. The Standards’ focus on increasing one’s knowledge of diversity, different cultures and the services available in the community overshadows a discussion of power, racism, and ethnocentrism. Both of these situations bring up complex and rich issues that deserve discussion and debate; the Standards does not address these issues.

Leonard (1997), in *Postmodern Welfare: Reconstructing an Emancipatory Project* writes about the struggle to determine what approach one should take to cross-cultural communication. Leonard advocates for a “tentative, provisional, open-ended approach” to cross-cultural communication; he believes that “living with uncertainty may be the ethically appropriate contemporary condition” (p. 72). Leonard powerfully suggests, “white Western cultures...have surrendered, through their domination of the Other, the right to any certainty” (p. 72). It is interesting to examine the Standards through this lens.

A standard is defined as, “An acknowledged measure of comparison for quantitative or qualitative value; a criterion. Something, such as a practice or a product, which is widely recognized or employed, especially because of its excellence. A degree or level of requirement, excellence, or attainment. A requirement of moral conduct. Often used in the plural.” (www.dictionary.com)

Standards attempt to provide a degree of certainty by clearly stating what is expected; they articulate a goal or requirement. Through this critique, it is evident that the Standards for Cultural Competence seeks to provide social workers (presumably all of them are white) with certainty as they attempt to become more culturally competent, and assist their agencies in doing the same. It is troubling, then, that the Standards attempts to lay out a code of conduct for social workers but do not acknowledge the need for humility and constant reevaluation of methods. Rather than encouraging social workers to live “with uncertainty,” the Standards proposes an almost scientific method for approaching the project of becoming culturally competent. The Standards gives social workers many concrete things they can do. For example, “social workers shall be knowledgeable about and skillful in the use of services available in the community and broader society and be able to make appropriate referrals for their diverse clients”. This cultural competency “to do list” may be comforting for most social workers, but it does little to challenge social workers, particularly White social workers, to put their beliefs and practices up for what Leonard calls “cross-cultural interrogation” (p. 76).

CONCLUSION

It is essential that white social workers recognize that they operate in a system of institutionalized racism. Unlearning and undoing racism will be an ongoing, uncomfortable process requiring learning about other cultures, asking questions, making mistakes, being vulnerable, and changing course when necessary. It will require being accountable to the results of “cross-cultural interrogation” of “our most cherished beliefs” (Leonard, p. 76). In our view, this type of cultural competency is not an attainable goal; it is a dialogical, ongoing process.


**BASW Students Voices**

The editor would like to thank Prof. Rita Takahashi for editing, compiling, and taking photos for all BASW students’ writings.

**JESSICA BRUNA**

I was lucky that my father encouraged me to find what I liked on my own and even test the limits of the male dominating world. With his support, I joined sports teams, took wood-working class, and was still able to get my nails done, and shop with the girls. . . . I feel that by testing my limits and expanding some of them, I will be adding to work already done for women. Maybe another generation will be able to get just a bit further because of some groundwork I was able to provide.
**MARTHA ELIAS**

I was the last of four children born to recently immigrated parents. They strived and struggled in the United States to establish themselves and to make a home for their family. We were raised in much the same manner that my parents were raised in rural Mexico. They wanted to instill in us the same values, norms, and traditions they were raised with when they were children.

While I grew up to believe that a woman’s place was in the home, I was seeing women as professionals with positions of authority. The Catholic religion, which is so tightly ingrained in the Mexican culture, always called for the purity of women until marriage while nothing was ever said about the men. Now I hear sexually liberated women advocate for the renunciation of double standards. I am inspired by politically conscious women demanding equality both inside and outside the home. Hearing all this motivated me to be just like these women. I want to be taken seriously in everything that I do and intend to do in the future. I want equal access to the opportunities that males have, such as education, career, and respect.

**AMY HICKS**

My primary goal as an educated woman is to have my own practice in social work; the secondary goal is to receive an LCSW [Licensed Clinical Social Work], and my tertiary goal is to learn as much as I can about the field. If I want something bad enough, I can get it, regardless of my sex or gender. The goals will come with hard work and determination, and I will accomplish anything I have my mind set on. I can choose to follow the norms of society, which may be easier but will not make me happy, or I can challenge the norms and be fulfilled within myself.

**NATASHA KUNIN**

My mother’s parents were the children of immigrants; my grandmother was Irish and my grandfather was German. My father’s parents were immigrants too. His mother was born in Poland and his father in Russia. Being Jewish, they fled Europe during World War II. As my mother was raised Catholic and my father Jewish, they did not raise their children to practice any formal religion. I believe this culture clash between my parents led them to deny their own backgrounds, which were passed on to my siblings and me in only subtle ways.

My mother considered herself a feminist, often pointing out gender inequities in society, sexist commercials and television shows. Rejecting national feminine standards of beauty, my mother wore little makeup, did not dye her naturally silver hair, and wore her artist's paint-stained, worn, and casual clothes. While it was embarrassing to me at the time, I now appreciate my mother’s nonconformity. Despite my mother’s efforts, she could not completely shield me from the societal pressures of our strict female beauty standards, one of the main criteria upon which women in our society are rated.

**CHUN YIN LAW**

My life experiences constructed my gender identity. Throughout my life course, a male role model hardly existed. When I was still living in Hong Kong, my grandmother raised me because my parents were busy with their careers. Then after my parents and I immigrated to the United States, I mostly lived with my mother because relationship difficulties between my parents caused my father to abandon the family. Since my father was hardly present in my life, I mostly learned to be masculine by observing my peers and the media.

Most people simply ignore the inequalities of this society. Education is the key in bringing awareness of the issues. The knowledge individuals gained can be used to change themselves and also the larger society.
LINDSAY LAWLER

The socialization process that I was a part of took place in a small conservative town in central California. There were very specific ideas about how women were supposed to behave and what privileges they do or do not have based on those behaviors. Peers whom I went to high school with and who never left the area have slipped into the same oppressive habits their parents had, and that they complained of, as we were growing up.

As a woman living in America today, I feel as though I have the right to be free of all [gendered] pressures and inequalities. I do not feel as though I should fear men or let them dominate any part of my existence. The reality, however, is that I am living in one small time period in an evolutionary process that may take hundreds of years to come. Even here in the United States, we share the injustice of the world’s women.

YISEL OFELIA LEDEZMA (HUERTA)

I was born in Mexico, Cuquio Jalisco. The scary part about moving to the U.S. wasn’t only leaving my relatives, friends, and toys (dolls), but crossing the border as undocumented immigrants. I was a little eight-year-old girl when we crossed the Mexican border at night with my mom, older brother, and younger sister and many other strangers. The “coyote” or the guy we paid to show us the safe way to cross kept stopping to rest. I remember asking my mom why the guy kept stopping all the time, and she said that he thought my sister and I were getting tired. I didn’t feel the almost four hour walk; all I wanted to do was get to where my dad was and to start our new lives together. Thankfully, we made it across the border safely and within twenty-four hours we were in downtown San Francisco, looking up at skyscrapers. The thought about crossing the border is more frightening to me now.

When relatives come to the U.S. undocumented, I hear their stories of coyotes that leave people in the middle of the desert, or use the women as prostitutes after they cross and many other horrible stories. It was hard getting used to the American way, laws, and rules. For my parents, that meant giving up most of their heritage and beliefs. Socially, if we kept every single belief that people in Mexico go by, we would have been looked at as outcasts. It was hard, but we made the transition.

MARILOPEZ

I was born and raised in San Francisco, California. Both my parents were born in Mexico, and as they were growing up, they were taught that the males should work outside the home and that the females should stay at home, cleaning and cooking for the family. Knowing that my mother left Mexico to get away from gender roles, it is weird to see that her way of thinking changed a little.

Although my mother realizes that women are seen as objects and are treated not the same as men, she also keeps some of the roles that are expected of women. She wants me to learn how to cook, and she wants my room to continue to look girly, with pink walls and pink curtains. She also wants me to act feminine and to wear dresses and look like “Snow White.” At the same time, my mother wants me to get an education and to have a career in anything. Getting a degree in something, she says, will help me in the long run so that I do not have to depend on men. My father agrees. 

MARISOL PADILLA

The women in my family were taught to be submissive and to never question male authority. These rules were eventually passed down to me, by my grandmother, as soon as I was old enough to understand. My grandmother taught me that my place as a woman is to remain at home. I am constantly reminded to follow these gender roles. I am frequently told that if I don’t know how to clean properly or cook, no man will ever want to marry me.
While my extended family glorified manhood and gave all the power to the men, at home I was experiencing the absence of my father. Struggling on her own with two children, my mother played several roles, as breadwinner and caretaker. Our family structure of a single-parent role was the complete opposite of the “male-as-the-breadwinner model,” a structure that my grandparents tried so hard to hold on to. In my home, it was the woman that came home exhausted from a long day at work. While my grandmother communicated gender roles such as the woman’s place is in the home, my mother was experiencing a very distant reality.

MARYELA PADILLA

I devoted myself after school to cheerleading and dance for a couple of years. Cheerleading is known to be a very feminine sport. Even though it is a sport for both genders, it is stereotyped to be only for women. Our cheerleading team was really good and we won first place at our competitions, but our school did not honor us like we deserved to be. All the men sports got all the attention even if they did not win.

As I grew older I started to get involved in many other activities, such as basketball. I was beginning to be involved in “men’s sports.” Girls had the equal opportunity to play sports, but were not respected or honored. Many did not attend games, and the school did not honor us when games were won.

SANGEETA RAM

I am not only a woman but also an immigrant from the Fiji Islands. My culture plays a great role in shaping my self-identity and the way I choose to live my life. I am from an Indian culture where women are expected to cook and clean from the time they are about eight or nine. Women are raised to be good wives and mothers.

I think religion and culture go hand in hand to shaping people’s views and perceptions. Most religions don’t include women as religious leaders, such as priests. Women are almost never in charge of churches, temples, and or mosques. Instead, they are covered or put in the back. My goals in life have come out of wanting to obtain knowledge and beat the stereotypical portrayal of women. Just because I am an Indian woman does not mean that I want to get married and have children.

LILIANA RAMOS

I enjoyed being a girl and playing with dolls, dressing up, playing mom, etc. I never felt that I was living a typical female stereotype. I think a lot of what I learned came from what I saw on television. If a commercial came on to advertise a new doll, there was never a boy playing with the doll and there was never a girl playing with action figures. Therefore, I think the media played a big role in feeding me stereotypes.

I never really thought that I dealt with issues of sexism in my daily life because I didn’t know how to categorize them as sexism. For example, reading about sexism and learning what it involves has made me realize that I have experienced it. Sexual harassment is a form of sexism that I have experienced. When I started my first job, I received a packet about sexual harassment and it was at that point when I realized that that was what I had experienced before.

REBECA URQUILLA

My parents are from Central America. My mother is from Nicaragua, and my father is from El Salvador. Both grew up with high morals and values. When I was young, I never got to play with the boys. My cousins always played baseball, football, soccer and other “manly” games in our backyard. I was not allowed to play because they played too rough and did not want me to get hurt. My mother always said it is inappropriate to play with the boys because people would think I was a “Tomboy.” So,
sadly, I would just sit in the distance and watch, or play with Barbie dolls with my friend.

Now that I am older, I realize that sexism is even a part of my job. I work at a gym, and because we are females, we are expected to look thin, dress nicely, and act cheerful. I am told to smile, and I even got into trouble by my manager for not smiling. I feel that this is very sexist, especially because the males that I work with are never told to smile.

FRANCESCA IMPERIAL WINTERS

I'm not quite sure when I first became conscious of growing up a girl. Perhaps it was when I first became conscious of the concept of boy. Growing up girl for me oftentimes meant my crossing gender boundaries and labels. Claiming spirit and self, I wasn't concerned so much with form as I was with feeling. I wasn't paralyzed by the power of my body, nor did I fear it.

My heart aches and truly goes out to all those women who, by being taught to make small, were made smaller, and who, by fearing to take up too much space, were left with none. My thoughts further extend to all who said "yes," when the heartfelt response was "no," and to all women whose silence never protected them.

MSW Students Voices

MILA MALDONADO

If someone were to ask me now who are you? I would have to say I am a woman, a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a mentor, a godmother, a friend, a roommate, a graduate student, a classmate, an intern, a neighbor and so forth. In addition, I am a racially mixed Peruvian, bilingual/bicultural, a minority, cultural sensitive, a dancer, an advocate and a compassionate individual. I am very proud of the fact that I was born and raised in Peru. However, when I think of the living conditions I grew up with such as: extreme poverty, social injustice, discrimination, lack of infrastructure, alcoholism, and a victim of domestic violence, then I think of myself as a survival. I never used to think of myself this way, but when I take into consideration my life experiences as a woman living with a single mother, a brother and a sister and with no social services available to assist us whenever we needed them the most, then I can’t help but to think of myself and my family that way.

So, I guess there are many sides of me. Some were just giving to me, others I learned to accept and still others I have had to work at accepting. As an individual and as a minority living in this society, I have learned to adjust and function in a very complex society. My life experience, culture, attitudes and compassion have brought me into the social work profession and I believe with the combination of all those experiences, academic knowledge and support of my family and love ones, I am on my way to advocate and empower the life of many disenfranchised people in our society.

JACQUELINE MILLER

I identify myself as a multiracial and multicultural individual. More specifically, I identify as a hapa, an Amerasian, a woman of *nguoi lai* descent. What does it mean to identify as a multiracial individual? The experience of being multiracial or multicultural has meant exclusion at times from one or both ethnic groups of my orientation. It has meant navigating the terrain of inclusion in either group from a different reference point, one that shifts and changes and is not predetermined and constant. One plus one does not necessarily equal two. Racial and cultural paradigms create a third group in the multiracial individual where the sum of one’s parts is the lived experience in spaces in between and within categories. As a multiracial individual, one recognizes that identity is complex, personal, and unique. Regardless of the categories and boxes others impose upon us, our true identity is shaped by our experiences, our connections, our relationships, and our selves. By embracing my own definition of self I have learned “to embrace all facets of who I am, to embrace a SELF rooted in BEing equitable in my soul, learning to nourish well-being and differentness in SELF and others.”

ADINA MORGUELAN

Most succinctly, I identify as a Jewish, lesbian activist. Born and raised in Los Angeles, as a young girl I thought the whole world was Jewish. I remember being very shocked to learn from my father that Jews made up only about 2% of the population in the United States. In my limited childhood world, I just could not reconcile that piece of information with the amount of Jewish people that I knew. As a young girl, I understood that my identity was different than the mainstream. I was a Bat-Mitzvah at the age of 13. This meant I was welcomed into the adult culture of Judaism. I remember standing in front of my family and friends and feeling, very powerfully, a connection to the legacy of Jews that had
come before me, as well as a responsibility to those who would come after. The Jewish people have been in the past, and continue to be, oppressed. I feel a strong need to stand up for the rights of my people – and all people; to remember the horrors of the Holocaust, to be a beacon for truth and justice, to never let that happen again – to anyone, anywhere. If there is any one thing that my identity as a Jew has taught me, it’s that knowledge is power – never stop learning!

ALISON PATRICK

I think of myself as a prairie woman. I am a Canadian citizen with immigrant status. I am Caucasian of Scottish, English and Irish ethnicity. My grandfathers were immigrants to Canada; my grandmothers were both born in Canada. Culturally I am from the Canadian Prairies, a person who finds beauty in flat land, open spaces and big sky. I am expanding my sense of beauty to hills, fog, and the intensity of the urban landscape. I am aware of my racial and cultural heritage in this community. I have lost my invisibility and gained a sharper sense of self.

IMRSWP Mission

The Institute for Multicultural Research and Social Work Practice promotes respect for and knowledge of diverse cultures. It seeks to develop effective methods for appropriately working in a multiculturally diverse and complex environment. It disseminates cross cultural information through research, publication, education, and training. The central focus is on empowerment of individuals, families, and communities. The commitment is to progressive societal changes. Collaborative and cooperative efforts in multiple settings – from work place to ethnic communities – are emphasized.

IMRSWP Goals

1. Conduct research that promotes greater knowledge and understanding of diverse cultures.
2. Develop methods, to enhance effectiveness and appropriateness in working with diverse populations. Use collaborative and participatory methods.
3. Disseminate research findings and educational information to students, organizations, and the general public via publications, presentations, and workshops.
4. Work with social work students interested in multicultural service delivery systems, and provide ongoing resources and support services to enhance their educational experiences.
5. Conduct evaluations and needs assessments of organizations and communities.
6. Analyze social policies and make recommendations that are congruent to the Institute’s mission.
7. Sponsor conferences and workshops that focus on cross-cultural research and social work practice.

IMRSWP Members

Eileen Levy, Cindi Kim, Liz Knox, Dianne Mahan, Susan Sung, Rita Takahashi, Qingwen Xu, Miu Chung Yan (Director)

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