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OSU Multiracial Beavers Project 2016-2017**

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**Interviewees/Interviewers:** Vanessa Johnson and Jonathan Stoll

**Transcriber:** Jalen Todd

VJ: Vanessa Johnson

JS: Jonathan Stoll

[00:00:00]

VJ: Alright, my name is Vanessa Johnson.

JS: My name is Jonathan Stoll.

VJ: And we're participating in an oral histories, Multiracial Oral Histories Project. We will get started. I'll ask you first. Okay, what motivated you to participate in this interview?

JS: I think the opportunity to share about myself, to tell my story. I've been involved in Multiracial Aikido, Racial Aikido. I think this is, in terms of identity, obviously something that continues in terms of exploration and learning about yourself. I think I went into this thinking that, initially, it would be just a one-way interview and I was really excited when I found out I get to speak with you, Vanessa, and the opportunity to connect and have a give and take as opposed to just me talking. Now I get to ask the same question of you. What motivated you, Vanessa, to participate in this interview?

VJ: So, Charlene Martinez got me involved with Multiracial Beavers and this just seemed like a great opportunity to share my story and talk about identity. I was also really excited when I learned I got to interview with you. I'm glad we got this time to talk with one another about our stories and to be able to share those.

JS: Well let's get into it. So, I'll ask the second question first. How do you identify – oh what did I do?

VJ: Oh, it's okay. Yeah, I think it's: how do you identify and – yes, discard. Sorry Kali.  
[both laugh]

VJ: I know transcribe – actually I think the library is going to transcribe – sorry librarians.

JS: Alright, I won't touch this again. How do you identify in terms of racial and ethnic identities? What are your other salient identities? How, if at all, has your identity changed over time?

VJ: That's a long question. I identify as multiracial. My father is white, Caucasian, and my mother's Peruvian. I keep looking at this recorder [laughs]. Over time – my other salient identities. I identify as female, as a woman, a heterosexual woman, and those are what's coming to mind right now at nine in the morning but I'll move on. How has my identity changed over time? I think that also goes into the next question but I think when I was younger I felt really separated from – I knew my mother was Latina but that was her and not me. It was something we didn't talk about in the home. So it wasn't until even graduate school that I got to – the seeds were planted in undergrad I think, but it wasn't until grad school that I really started to try to connect more. I guess spend more time exploring my identity.

JS: Did you – and this might be going into the later questions – did you grow up with that Peruvian culture?

VJ: We did, yeah. I was thinking about this question last night, like 'how was it?' We had the Peruvian food and mom tried to get me to learn the dances which I wasn't down [laughs]. Just because I was so shy when I was little. But we had family, her side of the family, my mother's side, over all the time. Spanish was spoken all the time. Listening to music all the time. So it was something I grew up with and I don't know, I thought when I was little maybe everyone had that experience but later on realized that experience was unique. It wasn't until grade school that it was a really salient, a really clear memory that I still have of being asked of what I was. Because they were like 'okay, your dad's white and your mom's...' 'Oh my mom's Peruvian.' 'Oh, right. So what does that make you?' And that was my first moment where I went [gasp] and it was my first moment too where anything that wasn't white was bad. So I was like 'no, no, no I'm white like my dad.' So that was like when I was fourth or fifth grade. Before then it wasn't like, I don't know, I felt like everybody else. I don't know. What about you? So how do you identify in terms of racial and ethnic identity, what are your other salient identities, and how, if at all, has your identity changed over time?

[00:05:26]

JS: So my mother is Portuguese and Indian. My father is white. He's German-Hungarian. I think there's some French in there. My mother was born and raised in

Kenya. So that made me confused [laughs]. I remember in elementary school they had drop the flags to say where you're from. You know most kids, their flag is like one or two things and I remember having four quadrants. I included Kenya in there because my mother was from there. And to this day I kind of joke about me being African American and refer to Africa as the mother land. I think I was just kind of confused, I'll talk more about that in a second, but in terms of my salient identities I guess: being male, heterosexual, able bodied, currently in the process of exploring Islam, so potentially Muslim but not there yet. So, in terms of how that identity has changed; interestingly, my mom, and I, like you, grew up without having those conversations. I think, even to this day, I haven't had as much detailed conversation as I probably should. Even in terms of how I identify has somewhat changed. I used to identify myself as a 'pigh' because I would get asked so often 'what are you.' Eventually I just came up with the response that I'm a pigh which is Portuguese, Indian, Hungarian, German is silent. Maybe my response was just kind of being funny, having a joke with it. It never really bothered me. I don't know that I really recognized the fact that I was different, so to speak. Maybe until high school because of how segregated things were. Not explicitly, but just in terms of people would tend to hang out with others who had similar interests. The jocks would hang out with jocks, but also ethnically and racially, right. White people, black people, and not really having a group to connect with. I think I often deflected, if there were jokes about Indians I'd be like well I'm not Indian, that doesn't affect me. I kind of had this approach were there might be jokes about different groups and nothing impacted me because I didn't identify with those. It was kind of like a double-edged sword in that sense because I didn't really have any connections with people in regards to racial identity. Interestingly, I think as I've learned more about my mother and Portuguese in Goa, just the sense, the notion of the colonizer in terms of—I didn't realize that at first when my mom said Goa and Portuguese-Indian, Goa was colonized by Portugal as opposed to the rest of India which was colonized by the British. So that's kind of an interesting piece there too in terms of identifying with the colonizer and what does that mean. I asked the question of you in terms of if you grow up with that culture because I didn't. I think, even probably today, there's a certain level of disappointment or—it's not regret because it wasn't my decision—but the fact that my mother and all of her siblings, for that matter, when they came here there was really an emphasis on assimilating to American culture. They all married white men or women, we're talking about five of them. I don't think that was a coincidence. You know, it's the American Dream - White being considered what is successful. Probably for my father and others, persons of color at least means being somewhat exotic, with the kind of terminology you used.

VJ: My mom did the same thing, all the sisters all married white men. Growing up she tried to teach us Spanish but my brother, my brother's older than me, one of his grade school teachers to my mom to stop teaching us Spanish because she's confusing us. So

she stopped which is really sad because now I feel like when I speak I feel kind of – I don't know why I feel kind of embarrassed because I sound so 'gringa.' Because I don't have an accent. My partner's family makes fun, I should say he makes fun of me because he's like 'oh your Spanish not good.' And I'm like I know, but you kind of get what I'm trying to say and I understand you.

JS: When did you learn Spanish? Did you learn it at home or later on in life?

[00:10:22]

VJ: I understood it when I was growing up. I could understand a little bit but it wasn't until college that I started more seriously studying the language. But when you were talking about the colonizer and the colonized, that's kind of like, at least with my mother's side, because her great-grandparents are from Spain and they're the ones that came over to Peru and colonized the Indians, the indigenous peoples. So even her, I see her internalize racism too because it was like 'oh, I'm not like those other Latinos' or 'oh, we're lighter skinned than the darker skinned' and it just really – and even within her own family the way they treat each other, it's just very interesting. So when you were talking it just remind me of that.

JS: Well let's go on to the next question.

VJ: For sure. I'm sorry I didn't mean to cut you off or anything.

JS: No, no, not at all.

VJ: Okay, what are some of your earliest memories of other people making assumptions about your racial and ethnic identity?

JS: So I grew up in the Bay Area, which is really diverse. I think I have a bad memory in general, I'm trying to....The thing that comes to mind most frequently – and this is, I don't consider this a negative thing – going back to the 'supermercado,' the Mexican grocery store, and checking out and folks speaking Spanish to me because it was often perceived that I was Mexican. And I would just respond with the little Spanish that I knew and they would then respond with English, probably just because of accent or just how short and brief – you know, because it was pretty limited what I could say. So then they would start speaking English to me. Let's see, I had another thought that I was going to share. I feel pressure because I'm being recorded [laughs].

VJ: I know, I can cover it.

JS: Why doing you talk and I'll –

VJ: You'll remember.

JS: Yeah, remember. It'll come back to me, sorry.

VJ: No, for sure. So I shared the fourth grade memory, that was one of my earliest memories. And then like, I think a lot of objectification happening too. I forget how the conversations started, but I remember this white man that I was volunteering with was like, 'oh that's because you're exotic.' So words like 'exotic,' 'for the longest time I've been trying to figure out what you were', 'I thought you were Greek,' 'I thought you were white but then I looked at your butt and I was like she cannot be white.' And so I'm like 'oh, wow. okay.' And then having an ex-boyfriend's family--they had adopted a little boy who's like half-Dominican, half - I think - Mexican--being like, 'can you talk to him about his skin color, you know because you're kind of brown so can you talk to him?'

JS: About what?

VJ: About what!

JS: Just about being brown.

VJ: Just about how beautiful his skin is, you know. And I just, you know Utah's pretty white but come on. Like what? It was just like. I didn't know really what to say. So memories like that, but I guess like earliest assumptions, later on finding out--yeah I don't know if on the census growing up they even had an 'other' box or a 'multiracial' box but I think for as long as I can remember he's [her dad] been identifying our family as white. So when I found out about that I was like 'what? I mean you are and I'm half, but then there's mom.' I don't know. It's so complicated and my dad doesn't see a lot of the racial prejudices that happens to my mom. He just kind of in his own world. Anyway. So I'll just leave those experiences for now, I'm sure I have a lot more.

JS: Did you ever notice--because I feel like I never did. And I feel like maybe it was just a matter of me being naive or just not particularly observant in aware of things in terms of having two parents of different colors, racial backgrounds, particularly maybe in Utah where it's predominantly white. People kind of giving a double-take in that kind of experience. Okay.

[00:15:03]

VJ: Oh yeah, for sure. I got it--one time I had in high school a boy had invited me to a play so his father came and picked us up and I was upstairs and I heard the door slam really hard and I was like 'oh no, what happened.' I saw my mom and she was really upset and she said, 'your ride's here!' And I said 'okay, see you later mom.' Then in the car his dad was like 'was that your mother?' and I said yeah, but she was in the middle of cleaning so she had a bandana on and stuff and he thought she was the house keeper. But growing up to just always -- 'oh no Vanessa you order, you order' - if we go through drive-thrus because she didn't like to talk because people would always ask 'what? what did you say?' And she just--she was sick of it. I was able to notice those things I think just growing older and older. Still, it wasn't like, I didn't explore my own identity. I don't know.

JS: Yeah I think, 'cos on my mom's side, 'cos all of my cousins looked like me, so to speak, and I'd go to my dad's side of the family and we're all brown and everyone else is white. So it's kind of an interesting dynamic. And part of it, I guess, not feeling like I fit in there wasn't so much that I felt isolated because of my color as much as, we lived in Northern California in the Bay Area and they were all in Southern California. So I always kind of equated it to, well they have a stronger connection, they have a stronger relationship with my grandparents because they see them more frequently. I never felt like I was treated differently by my grandparents or that they treated my mother any differently. So I recalled as we were talking one of the things that I think was interesting for me growing up was--I think in high school it must have been--where people always thought that I was Mexican. Whether it was the grocery store or when you asked somebody. Because often times what would happen is people would ask me 'what are you?' and I would say 'what do you think I am?' It just became this kind of game. More often than not growing up where we did with a large Mexican population, Mexican-American population, folks would guess that I was Mexican. I don't know how it came to be, but I think almost subconsciously I kind of took on this Mexican-American identity where I was attracted to Latinas; my wife still to this day gives me hard time about this. I wouldn't walk outside with the hair net on but in the morning getting ready I would put a hair net on and I would use the hair spray so my hair was slicked back like a lot of Mexican-Americans did. So I just kind of, maybe even in the clothes that I wore, I mean just kind of took on this persona and maybe it was trying to fill this void because I didn't really have this clear identity. Again I was just kind of confused, like what am I? I think it was at the end of high school when I was applying for scholarships for school that I began wanting to exploit my identities [laughs]. Particularly my mom--

VJ: [laughs] For scholarships!

JS: Right, 'cos there weren't really scholarships really for Indians. There were plenty for Native Americans but none from India. And again, I didn't have any cultural connection to any of these. My mom assimilated and we grew up with--so for example she grew up eating spicy foods, really loved spicy foods. Dad didn't like spicy food so she didn't cook spicy food so we didn't grow up with that. It was just a wide assortment of like steak, and enchiladas, and tacos, and spaghetti, and just everything. There was nothing specific to Goa or Kenya. Maybe, "American Traditional Food" or this hodge-podge of different things. And so, applying for schools though, I was trying to connect with my culture so to speak, basically so that I would be eligible for a scholarship. I didn't know anything about Portugal but I'm like, alright does this make me Latino in some ways because there's a lot of scholarships available for Latinos? So I was just trying to exploit this culture, I guess, for my own self-serving purposes so I could get some money for school. Then obviously, with regards to boxes, whether--I can't remember if it was 'other' or if I would just--I probably checked 'white' and couldn't find anything that coincided with Goa. Maybe I even checked 'African-American' if they had that, I can't remember. It was kind of just like a game to me, right? Because you're not going to capture me so I'm just going to mess with you in terms of your data. [both laugh].

VJ: That's great.

JS: Alright, sorry. Next question.

VJ: For sure. Okay, what are some more recent memorable experiences you've had related to your racial and ethnic identity?

[00:20:20]

JS: Okay, this might be getting into the OSU question too, but I never really identified as a person of color. And I think that had to do with where I grew up. Even in elementary school, middle school, high school, even though I didn't have that sense of identity, again, I don't think it was until middle school/high school that I realized that I was "different" to some degree. Because there were so many people, I remember in elementary school it was a very average group. I remember I had friends who were white and Asian and black, and so it didn't stand out as I was any different because there was this wide spectrum of different ethnicities that were represented at the school and within my friend group. But it wasn't until I came to Oregon State, and this was like two or three years ago, so you talk about in terms of exploring identity and how that might change over time, that I really began to identify as a person of color. Basically because there's white people everywhere. I remember specifically, my wife and I were biking, we had our trailer with our daughter and--oh I've got to make a note

of that in terms of being a parent and not having a culture that I could pass down--but we're riding by a park and we see a bunch of black and brown people and we're like, 'what is this? What's going on? We'd only been here for like two weeks or so. And my wife is like, 'hey we've got to stop by there.' So we continued biking and on our way back we stopped by there and it turned out--I think Charlene was there and Branden who used to work here who was celebrating his birthday. But it was basically all the black and brown people in Corvallis were all here at this park, celebrating his birthday. So that was kind of funny. Just that reality that because of the place that you live in, then that kind of, I guess, to me then beginning to identify as a person of color as opposed to before whatever reason, because my environment, it wasn't as obvious. Or I just didn't--I knew I was a person of color, but it was just not important to identify that. I don't know if it was out of, not necessity, but maybe convenience. To take on this identity for this ability to be in a new place where I don't know anyone, where I don't have friends, to be able to connect with people and cultivate a connection with others through, in this case, my racial identity and the way that I look. For whatever reason that's kind of what I began to do in the last couple of years. Then, the note I made unrelated to this, I guess, going back to a few other questions ago, was my wife. She's Afghan. Our children, while they don't speak Farsi, they completely understand Farsi. She has a culture to pass on to our children, where she cooks Afghan food, listens to the music, even on special holidays and times we'll dress up in traditional Afghan clothes. So there's this--she has a very deep connection and she was born there and came here as a refugee. So there's a deep connection with that culture, with that country, and I have none of that. I have the United States of America, but it's nothing unique, we all have that. It's difficult at times, trying to figure out what am I passing on to my children in terms of a connection with who they are. What does that even mean? Now I joke that they're 'apigh' - because they're Afghan, Portuguese, Indian, Hungarian, German, so that acronym keeps growing. This might be the end of it. But that's something that saddens me at times. Thinking about how I didn't have that and how I would like to share something with them. I had this conversation with my wife in terms of what would it be if I were to kind of become immersed in some level of Indian culture. Part of me feels like I could do it but it wouldn't quite be authentic. Maybe it's similar to you learning Spanish and not feeling completely comfortable with it. Feeling that you still have an accent and thing about if I were to learn some form of music, maybe there would be an accent of some sort that didn't feel authentic because I didn't grow up with it.

[00:25:08]

So I haven't investigated that or done anything. It's just one of those things that I feel like I missed out on something. I think I--sometimes I kind of blame my mom for that. For not holding on to that. And I know it's difficult, I'm not saying that I literally blame

her, because I understand the societal pressures in terms of like your mother not speaking Spanish. They all wanted the best for their children and entering, in my case, my mother entering a new country, wanting to assimilate for American culture and speaking the language, because you thought that's what was necessary to get your child ahead and to provide them with the best opportunity available. Everything in terms of our parents comes from a good place, and it's difficult to make that decision then and there. I think we're in a different place today where even with our children we find that maybe right now they're not speaking English as well as some other kids. But it's not a rat race. It's not as if, because they're not speaking English right now when they're even ten, they'll then be at a huge advantage, because they have two languages, or multiple languages to speak and think about in terms of the world. That was just kind of what our parents were presented with at that point in time of what they thought was best.

VJ: Have you ever had a chance to sit down with your mom and ask her what made, I don't know--I know I've asked my mom for like, you know 'why did you stop speaking Spanish?' because I was three and still not really speaking. So she was really worried too, but it was because I was learning both. So it's like, I think if you held out just a little bit longer I would have totally got it. Just being able to sit down with your mom and having those conversations, have you done that?

JS: I feel like we've had some conversations, again probably not as much detail or as deep as I should go. Part of it I think, for my mother, was her growing up in Kenya and her family being from Goa. So her having a probably similar experience as myself in terms of living in a place that still wasn't home and then moving from that place. So that her and my uncle would speak Swahili, just kind of on family gatherings, just joking around. It was kind of like bringing up the language from the past so to speak. And they still do that to this day and they have a good time just laughing. Which was funny because then when Lion King came out, I was like I know some of these words. Or some of these words sound familiar. Hakuna matata, right, because my mom and uncle are saying these things. So there was some of that, but I think you're right, this is a conversation that I should have, but I suspect that it had to do with--because when she came here, my grandparents had ultimately died in a car crash and that's what ultimately brought them here. So they had every intention, they had actually purchased land and started building a home in Goa, so the intent and the plan was to return to India. But that never happened. So I think it was a matter of her growing up in a culture that wasn't home and then coming to a new culture and so through navigating all of that, assimilating to this new culture, because maybe in some respects that's what she had done in Kenya, to a certain degree. I don't know. But no, you're right, I haven't talked to her as much as I can and as much as I should.

VJ: Well, not just, like you should or anything. I was just curious--

JS: No, but I want to. I think that beyond, just kind of beyond the racial identity, that's just a matter of a relationship with my mother and maybe how forthcoming--often times she's reluctant to share. I have to push her a little bit more.

VJ: I hear you.

JS: Okay, it's your turn.

VJ: It's my turn.

JS: We're on four so.

VJ: Yeah, four.

JS: What are some more recent memorable experience you've had related to your racial or ethnic identity?

VJ: It's honestly, [sigh]. I mean, I'm so glad I'm here at Oregon State because it's the first time I've felt like I belong to a group. Because even undergrad--so I was able to get sponsored in because my ACT scores weren't that great to get into college, so I was sponsored into the university because I was multiracial. I as like, you know I'd like to get involved in--I'm going to join MEChA I'm going to join these kids and maybe I'll get to know someone I can identify with. Even with the students there, they were all speaking Spanish, which is great, I couldn't speak back. And it was really clique-y too, they'd all been friends probably for a while or had gone to high school together, what not. I just couldn't--I never felt like I belonged anywhere so I just kind of stopped. I stopped getting involved and just focused on school and that's just what I did for number of years. Then grad school too, starting to identify a little bit more, and I think always trying to make an effort to know my, this other side of my identity. I felt like for so long I didn't do that for whatever reason. I grew up in a really white, suburban, middle class neighborhood so I think it was just really easy to be like, 'oh yeah I'm like all these kids too.' But then always being repeatedly being pointed out like, 'oh you're so tan. You're so lucky.' I'd be like 'thanks?' [laughs].

[00:31:35]

But I'm always like 'if I were a little darker would you say that same thing?' Coming here to Oregon State and getting to know other folks who are multiracial and being like 'oh yeah, you get it too.' I don't have to explain anything or need to laugh at all the things that are asked of all of us. I don't know, I just have really enjoyed that

connection. I really haven't had that. I haven't had that ever. Even my brother, I mean he doesn't identify as a man of color or even biracial, I think. He's got his own journey he probably, I don't know, I hope he eventually goes on but I don't know. I guess more recent, as far as identities, I think being here and being able to explore that, being able to connect with folks, being able to be like yeah, being a woman of color and identifying as that. Just being able to have a group, just having folks here that I can connect with has been wonderful and now that I'm leaving the university I'm worried that--and I know I'm not going to lose it because I can continue relationships and keeping in touch with folks. But being able to have that even at a university level even if you don't see each other too often but when you do it just feels familiar.

JS: Well in many ways you helped create that here so I imagine, I don't know what the demographics are, I imagine it's comparable to Corvallis in terms of predominantly white and then you have pockets of people of color. So it might be the opportunity to replicate what you helped create here. Whether that's AFAPC or Multiracial Beavers--well it wouldn't be Beavers, but

VJ: [laughs] yeah, I know. Multiracial Utahs. Utahns.

JS: [Laughs] Utes. Are they the Utes?

VJ: Yeah, they're the Utes. And you know that's problematic in and of itself.

JS: What are Utes?

VJ: They're the Ute tribe.

JS: Oooh, got'cha.

VJ: Yeah, so there's--I can tell you all about that but that's another conversation.  
[Laughs]

JS: Yeah, that's another conversation recording.

VJ: Yeah, you know, we'll see. With AFAPC that was already established and it was just a matter of--

JS: Reinvigorating it because it was already around.

VJ: Yeah, reinvigorating it. Then Multiracial Beavers, I was looking forward to being involved with Multiracial Aikido this next year and was supposed to present with

Charlene and a few others in February, at the Critical Mixed Race Studies Conference. I also feel like I don't know what I can contribute because I wasn't too, I wasn't a part of Multiracial Aikido and I was just a member of Multiracial Beavers, and I don't know. I'll have to talk to Charlene about that. I'd like to continue reading more research about studies on multiracial students and experiences and I think that's what I can take away from my experiences being here. Just continuing doing that and trying to connect with folks too when I go back to Utah.

[00:35:13]

JS: I think that was the first time with Multiracial Aikido when that was becoming organized, or maybe it was with some of these other groups that were formulating. Was just the notion that there's other folks who've had a similar experience, regardless of what that mix is in terms of being multiracial, was having some students and having--it was interesting because I'm here, this is Multiracial Aikido. Or even at Racial Aikido in this facilitator role. I think there's this impression or this perception that, because you're the facilitator that you've got it all figured out. You're the "expert." Obviously, anyone who's a facilitator realizes you're learning just as much as everyone else and that was really interesting. I think it was actually after Racial Aikido that they brought Racial Aikido participants and EWI--Exploring White Identity-- participants together just to help build community between these different groups. There was a break out session where everyone for the most part was--it was a one day activity--we were sharing and engaged with one another and at some point we broke out, and I forgot exactly what the break out groups were, but there was one for those who identified as multiracial. Because multiracial students, at least those who had some part white or Caucasian and some part persons of color, ultimately had a decision to make as to which of these conferences they attended. So I think we had our break out and there may have been two students who attended the Racial Aikido and one who attended the EWI, whatever it was. And I think it was a really, I think that was probably the first experience, and again this is like two years ago, where I engaged in a conversation with folks who I felt like had a similar experience to me in terms of the sense of confusion or lack of connection. I think it really helped me process my identity. It helped make a little bit more sense of that. And I had another note, related to what we were talking about earlier. I don't know if this had to do with being multiracial--and it's kind of a sad story--but in middle school I remember being attracted to a white girl, and it wasn't as if she did anything or anyone did anything, it was more of just my perception in kind of looking at the situation around me where I felt that, at least what I observed, was people tended to date those that they looked like. So realizing that the white girls were generally dating the white guys. So I was attracted to this girl and being in the shower and using soap and thinking that if I used enough of it, it would lighten my skin. And just how troubling that sounds, to think that that was my mindset where I desired to be

lighter because I thought that that might give me a better shot at this girl. That she might like me--and again, it wasn't as if somebody said, 'I don't like you because you're brown or you're dirty'. I didn't experience anything so explicitly racist as that. It was more of just the culture and my observation and how I felt how I fit or didn't, so I thought that that was kind of interesting. That might have just been--I shouldn't just dismiss it of being middle school and being insecure and everything that happens with middle school, because there's certainly an element of race and all of that within it. But that was something I definitely remember as--yeah.

VJ: No, it's really powerful, and think says something about the environments we grow up in and the messages we receiving whether we realize we're getting them or not. I mean, there's obviously some sort of messaging you were getting that made you feel like--well obviously seeing the girls, the white girls just dating the white guys and so.

JS: Yeah, and I think about that living in Corvallis, having children who are multiracial and just being a woman and what does beauty mean. I think there's been studies and I probably have to do this in terms with my daughters in terms of having a black doll and a white doll or even some different shades of brown that might be more representative of them and their conception or perception of what is beautiful. Corvallis is a great town, it's very safe, low crime rate, great schools so for all intents and purposes it's a great place to raise a family. But what does it mean that you're so much more so this minority. I don't think--I have a one year old and a three year old--so they by no means, I don't think have recognized that their "different" in this environment, but maybe subconsciously it's had some kind of impact. And I don't know, I'm just speculating. I have nothing to indicate that there has been an influence on them and their identity and their perception of how they fit in or don't fit in. But it's something that I'm very cognizant about. Very mindful.

[00:40:59]

VJ: Yeah, I think that's--it'd be great because I think that growing up we didn't have those conversations and so growing up as the only multiracial girl in this all white really Mormon neighborhood. I remember, it was around fourth, fifth, sixth grade when I was--I started to notice how different my body was, just being about body shape than all the white girls, right. I hated my curly, wavy hair, and I just wished it was straight and wanting it to be lighter. As I got older, I was so curvy and like, 'I hate my thighs, why can't they be smaller?' Even having folks--even having my mom, one time I pointed out my thighs. She's like 'I don't know why you have these. I don't have them.' Because I'm curvy and so I'm like 'I don't know either.' Well I do now. I was able to travel to Spain which is where my great-grandparents are from and I say a lot of women that looked like me and had similar hair and same body type, shape and

everything. It was so validating. I was like, 'oh, this is so great! Oh my gosh' because no one looked like me and so it was really hard. I don't know if I got a disorder or something but I exercised a lot in high school and got really skinny, really really skinny and still you know, those bones aren't going anywhere. I think I remembered asking my pediatrician, is there anything I can do, can I shave my bones. I can't believe I was thinking that. These are your bones, you can't do anything they're your bone structure. They're not going anywhere. Just being like, this is awful. So, just when you were talking about your girls, I'm like yeah, that was hard. I think it was finally when I saw other women that looked like me that's when I felt validated, I was like okay. It did something for me. Maybe it was healing or something. So I no longer, I wish I looked like this, I was like I'm good. I'm okay.

JS: We're blending in kind of the racial identity with gender norms and that's something that, having two girls again, just one and three but just knowing the culture and society that we live in that I'm very mindful of, there's a lot of people who will comment. And they're positive things, like my daughter has really curly hair, and they're like 'I love her curls'. And I love them too. But then she's very hairy for a three year old so just being concerned that--with what you were saying in terms of what's the norm in the culture that you live in and in our American culture, particularly if you're talking about white women, you know, hair isn't something that's looked highly upon. Shave it off or you wax it. There's all these different ways of removing that hair. The implications of that as a young woman and certainly what she'll have to navigate, dealing with that. But I think it's interesting just the fact that in today's day and age, the fact that we're having this conversation, being that we both spoke about parents, families who really didn't have those conversations around race. And at least being more hopeful that having at least a conversation will help to some degree, you know. They'll probably have to navigate or deal with a number of different challenges either related to this or unrelated being the society that we live in but hopefully our awareness and having conversations like this with our children will help to some degree or another.

[00:45:33]

VJ: I hope so too. I'm looking--I don't know if I'm looking forward--I'm looking forward to conversations but it'll be good.

JS: I'll ask this one first.

VJ: Okay, sounds good.

JS: So, we're on to: do you have any stories of belonging or not belonging by your ethnic or racial groups? I feel like we've got into this but I don't know if you have anything to add to that.

VJ: No, I think we've kind of covered--I felt like I've covered it. Do you?

JS: I feel like I've got, I don't now if I have anything else to add to that.

VJ: Okay.

JS: So I'm going to ask number six then.

VJ: Sounds good.

JS: What is it like for you to be you in Oregon? What about OSU specifically? We've touched on this as well but if there's anything else that you...?

VJ: I mean, no I don't I have too much. I think it's really with OSU has been, yes it's a PWI, but we have a really great multiracial community and of faculty of color, staff of color that's just--yeah that's really made all the difference. Do you have anything to add?

JS: No.

VJ: Okay, [laughs].

JS: What is a two-sentence biography we can use for the Oregon Multicultural Archives? Or, before we get to that I don't know if there's anything--'cos it sounds like this is the last question on here.

VJ: Yeah, that's the last one.

JS: So before we get to our two-sentence biography, which sounds very difficult, I'll have to think about that. Is there anything else that either of us want to add before we conclude?

VJ: Nothing's really coming to mind, but I really appreciated being able to sit down with you and a lot of things--the stories you've shared, experiences, I just keep nodding my head like 'oh yeah' - that's how it was in my family and I get that. I just appreciate this time together.

JS: I've definitely appreciated this time and I'm thinking moving forward hopefully through this conversation, hopefully through this project, I think the idea would be folks learn from our experiences but hopefully even more so. I'm thinking if I were a young person, let's say twelve, fifteen, even eighteen, nineteen, hearing this conversation may have helped me, in terms of identifying with others who have experienced something, who feel a longing for some sort of connection. Knowing that there's others like us who share similar experiences, or who can relate in that way. That we're not as alone as we may have at some point though we were. Likewise, I really appreciate you sharing your story and being able to vibe off of this and being able to connect with one another on a little bit of deeper level so yeah. Thank you.

VJ: Absolutely. I absolutely agree. It's just so validating to hear that because we had conversations that weren't happening in the home. I was having--seeing my mother going through her experiences as a darker skin Latina and prejudices she's going through and having a father that's kind off in his own little world and doing his own thing and not really like--I don't know if he doesn't want to see these things going on. Just going through the school, yeah. It just would have been validating.

JS: Why do you, and I think I know the answer to this, maybe, but I've thought about this in terms of, if you have vanilla ice cream and chocolate ice cream, the ice cream becomes chocolate. It just kind of overtakes it and maybe that's why in Trump being elected, white people are so concerned about the minority taking over--maybe it just comes down to ice cream, right? [both laugh] Even with us, and I think part of it is just the culture that we live in, I think that if you're multiracial, particularly mixed with white. Both of us have to share that, particularly with fathers and mothers who are persons of color. We tend to identify more so with that color aspect when we're both of those things. I tend to think it's just because of where we live, particularly where in Oregon [it's] so white, so naturally then we're more inclined to identify as persons of color because that's what everyone sees us as. Vanilla ice cream and chocolate ice cream mixed.

[00:50:32]

VJ: I like that. I love those twist cones. [laughs] Okay, so the two sentence biography. And we--

JS: That's going to be mine. I'm going to stick to the ice cream. The twist ice cream cone.

VJ: Okay, that sounds good. Okay, so I did a little preparation last night. Okay, so my two-sentence biography is: Vanessa Johnson is a multiracial woman who worked at Oregon State University from 2014-2016 in the Student Affairs Research Evaluation and

Planning Office as a coordinator. In 2016, she decided to move back to Utah to be closer to family and to peruse further education. And that's it.

JS: I don't think I can leave it at ice cream now. [both laugh] So: Johnathan Stoll is a 'pigh' who--I don't know if that should be in but I'm still going to. Particularly as I explored Islam, like I told -- this is unrelated, but I've always thought it was funny, it was kind of pithy. I told my mother-in-law, who is a practicing Muslim, that I was a 'pigh' - she didn't think it was very funny at all. I don't think Muslims think it's a very funny thing to say, kind of derogatory, but I like it. I have a kind of twisted sense of humor so I still think it's funny. I don't know if they're going to transcribe this, maybe you guys can do some editing based on my two sentence biography. Something to the extent of being multiracial, being a 'pigh' p-i-g-h, by the way, who is the father of two multiracial girls who works at Oregon State University. I should have prepared.

VJ: It's okay. You're the director of--

JS: Director Corvallis Community Relations and the co-interim assistant Dean of Student Life. Definitely a mouthful. We'll leave it at that. Maybe whoever is transcribing this can pull out some other details from our interview to add to this bio. Cool.

VJ: That sounds good.

JS: Thanks Vanessa.

VJ: Thanks John. Okay so let's see if I can get it--

[00:53:18]