

# AHA Advocate Talk: Jeff Mio



**Samantha Ellison:** If you could have any super power what would it be and why?

**Jeff Mio:** Michael Jordan's super power. The best basketball player ever.

**SE:** How did you get interested in the field of psychology?

**JM:** When I was a child my earliest memory was my grandfather sitting me on his lap and saying to me, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" You want to be a doctor don't you and be a defiant child I said no. He kept insisting that I wanted to be a doctor. So my earliest memory is that I had all of this pressure to select what I wanted to be when I grew up. So when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade I was in this enrichment class and among them was this psychology class. We had to write a term paper and I happen to like psychology a lot. For my paper I looked at some optical illusions and I thought that they were pretty cool. So I thought psychologists understand optical illusions and so I decided to become a psychologist when I was ten or eleven and since I was so definitive in what I wanted to be and it sounded impressive enough to my grandfather, he then left me alone and I felt all this pressure lifted from my shoulders. I no longer had to choose and the rest is history.

**SE: What are some of the similarities and differences within the structures of the different levels of groups you talked about? You talked about the universal level, grouping level, and the individual level. Would you expand upon that?**

**JM:** One of the things I said before in our workshop is that we are like all other people, we are like some people, and we are like no person. At the universal level it is how we connect with people, we understand one another, based on universals of being human. We all have to eat we all have to sleep. One of the universals that anthropologists have found out is that we all have some kin to work and we all have some kin to play. So those are some universals and I told a few stories.

Like after 9/11, I heard this story about a woman that was asleep, in San Francisco because it was 6:45 in the morning out here when 9/11 happen. The phone rang and woke her up but she was too tired to get up so she stayed asleep and when she woke up she heard the message from her husband who had been in New York on a business trip. He was at the top of the world trade center and he knew he was going to die. And so he called her and said that he wanted to hear her voice one more time and tell you I loved you one more time. So I didn't have to be a white woman to understand the grief she must have felt. She lost her husband and two that she wasn't able to hear his voice one more time to tell him that she loved him. Also the guilt that she must have been feeling for sleeping and not getting up. So at the universal level I could understand how she could feel and most people could connect with a story like that.

Similarly when hurricane Katrina hit, there was an African American man who was being interviewed about losing his wife. They had been on the roof of their house and when the water was rushing by his wife slipped. He grasped her hand but she was being pulled away by the current. He was losing his grip on her and his grip on the roof. His wife said, "Honey you have to let me go." She ended up being swept away and he was devastated. You don't have to be a black man to understand his anguish and grief. Survivors guilt and the sadness of being the only partner left. Those are universal connections we can make with people. We can all easily understand how they would feel because we can put ourselves in their shoes. At the individual level, we are like no other person. I had identical twins in my multicultural course and one of the twins was a psychology major and the other was a business major. It turned out that the brother majoring in psychology attended most of my classes and his twin brother missed most of my classes. There was no surprise who did better, the brother who attended classes. Just because you have identical genetics doesn't mean you have identical experiences. So we are like no other person within the individual level.

In the middle is where I believe people deny, when talking about issues of diversity, they say well I don't see race, people are people. I had a student in my class talk about how he didn't see me as Asian, he just saw me as a person. I responded by saying well that would be like me saying I don't see you as a woman. Of course I see you as a woman and I would interact with you differently than a male. I try to be fair to both males and females, but its different and just because it is different doesn't mean that it is bad. I think it is easier for people to understand that men and women have different experiences. Why can't that be applied to different racial groups? Different racial groups respond differently. Now not everyone has the exact same experience and there are variations among men and women and there are variations among ethnic groups and different sexual orientation groups, and there are

differences amongst people who have disabilities. There are also similarities that they share and so because of the similarities, people respond to the groups in a particular way, we are like some other people.

I guess part of the issue in studying multicultural education is to get people to understand all three of these layers and realize that all these parts are important parts of our identities.

### **SE: Could you discuss the minority and majority development models?**

**JM:** Both of the models are essentially the same in that it is a process in developing one's identity. So first of all you have the status of being somewhat naïve, thinking that people are people and that everyone is the same. That is kind of the naïve view of things cause as you come to find out people do respond to you differently and as we talk about racial ethnic groups and the minority identity development, at the beginning many may want to deny many things about their ethnicity or feel as if it is not an important part about how they feel about themselves and how the world reacts to them. And then they are confronted with something that makes it impossible for them to deny that race or ethnicity has anything to do with their identity. It could be a positive or a negative experience. Because this stage is called the counter, most people tend to focus on the negative. So if someone is trying to deny that their race or ethnicity has anything to do with their development and then they are confronted with racism, then that's kind of a slap in the face or a shock to the system. Now they can no longer deny that that is apart of who they are.

It could also be a positive experience. Like right now for an African American child, they might see that having Barack Obama leading the country as inspiring and really great. That can translate to believing that being African American or Black within this country is a great thing. Part of being in a racial or ethnic group because a sense of pride or protection. So the positive would be pride and if you encounter racism it becomes part of protection because you have encountered other people who have encountered racism and it begins to serve as a buffer. That sometimes leads people to an over involvement within their own racial or ethnic group and a rejection to anything outside of their own racial ethnic group. And that becomes unsatisfying eventually because if you truly are a minority that means that there are more people outside of your group that may have resources that maybe helpful to your group. If you are rejecting people outside of your group you may not be getting all the resources that your group deserves. What also might happen when one gets over involved is that their identity then becomes dependent upon a group of people and so maybe your identity is fragile. So you might have someone say that they are more Asian because they read Asian fairytales and then someone else will say no I am more Asian because I hangout with more people within my group more exclusively. So it becomes a competitive thing but it also means that you don't have that part of your identity internalized. And so in the end when you do have an internalized identity, it makes you feel secure of your identity and secure enough to go out and interact with other people and incorporate some of the other traditions some other groups may have. And if people accuse you of not being part of the group then you just say that no I am apart of the group I just like incorporating many view points. Similarly with the majority development, which is often referred to as the white identity model, at the beginning stages there can be this naïve part about people being people, only serving at the universal level, everyone being exactly the same. Again that is true at some levels but it is not true at all levels. And then there is an encounter or exposure to true

differences between groups and that some groups are really disadvantaged then other groups are. I always like to talk about how when the framers wrote the constitution they truly and really did mean that all men were created equal. They intended to exclude women because women did not have the right to vote. No land owners didn't have the right to vote either so it was only all male land owners who were created equal. Legally what that meant was white men and slaves were considered 3/5 of human beings only in conjunction with representation in the House of Representatives. There are some inequities that are still influencing us today and so they have one of two reactions, you become over involved in trying to fix the inequities or people become very defensive. So you can have one of the two reactions. Then finally, the majority group comes to an internalized resolution of your own identity.

**SE: Could you define what white privilege is and talk about other privileges within our society?**

**JM:** White privilege is a concept that was coined by a woman named Peggy Macintosh, who was the chair of her women's studies department. She was trying to get people to include more historical information about women within different disciplines. She kept being met with resistance as many would say that they would love to add historical information about women but that would mean they have to eliminate other information that was important. The important material meant important material that had been discovered by men. So she was very angry with this male privilege that she began talking about in the mid-80's. Some women of color came into her office and asked her why she just talked about stuff that white women had done. Why don't you talk more about things that women of color have done? She started giving the same talk that had been given to her from the men she had previously tried talking to. She had been excluding people of color while talking about what white women were doing. So she began to compile what she called her "Invisible Napsack of Privilege." If you're in the majority, the world is arranged so that people within the majority have certain advantages because they often have the power. For example statistically speaking, there are more women than men in the country, but men have the power. So people who have power develop rules that maintain their power. It is really hard to give up power. Her whole notion of white privilege is about giving up her power for the greater of the good.

**SE: We watched the Color of Fear in class and I know you have seen it many times, how would you describe this film?**

**JM:** This film is about a group of men who were assembled, two Asian men, two Latino men, two African American men, and two white men for a weekend retreat. All of the ethnic men were aware of the identity models and they had all been through the stages and were pretty much in the internalized stage. One of the white men in the film talks about how he is aware of racism and he also defines himself at the beginning of the film as a racist but he shares that throughout his life he has been trying to unlearn the racism that we all are exposed to. The other white man had a good heart but remained at the universal level, believing that we all are the same. He didn't understand issues of racism in the country. So

the weekend ended up being about the ethnic men trying to get the one white man to understand issues of racism within the country. He kept arguing that racism didn't exist and that you may see it on television but that is far removed from me. He said he was not racist and no one he knew was. So people were trying to get him to realize his own racism and his naïveness about racism was part of the problem contributing to racism.