



MARGARET MYERS

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Fishbowl Exercise using Episode 1 of The Equity Lookbook

Can you explain your identity?

I am a middle class white woman who has lived in both rural, very conservative and more liberal urban environments. I was born in Oklahoma and I grew up in rural Virginia. It was always expected that I would attend college. My mother had a Master's degree so higher education seemed accessible and was modeled for me early on. I ended up with a Bachelor's degree and then did my Master's coursework in the US and China. Growing up, my community was a largely agricultural one but had a sizable higher income, highly-educated population. I'd say that about 30% of my high school class went on to college. My decision to pursue foreign studies was based on a wide range of factors. My mother was a linguist and my home was filled with foreign language resources. I was also fortunate to travel abroad as a teenager. Those experiences were transformative. I studied foreign affairs in college and also studied Spanish and Chinese in college and for many years afterward. I now live in Washington DC with my husband and twin daughters.



What do you know about what happened in 1992 in Los Angeles?

I was 12 years old at the time and I remember the news coverage. I especially remember reports of looting and rioting and of Rodney King's beating. There was little said about the events in my community or school. Neither was particularly racially diverse. Maybe we were thought to be too young to really understand what happened. At the time, I certainly wasn't aware of the socio-economic and racial disparities that existed in much of the rest of the country, let alone in my own community. The coverage was shocking to me at 12 year old because of the level of violence but also because I largely associated LA with prosperity --- Hollywood, Beverly Hills, 90210, that type of thing



Are you familiar with Solidarity Economics?

No. Although based on the description provided, it seems a more inclusive approach to economic policymaking wherein a wide range of stakeholders have a say in the way a system is developed. An approach that takes a range of viewpoints and experiences into account to ensure a more responsive and equitable outcome.

Could you identify who would be the Top and who would be the Bottom in your community using inspiration from the slogan, Tame the Top & Lift the Bottom?

Washington, DC is a deeply divided city with great wealth and also considerable poverty. The northwest quadrant is the most privileged although there are pockets of wealth throughout the city. There are other areas that are seemingly up-and-coming. There are also very poor, low income communities with high rates of violence. Many of these communities are in the city's east. It is really a very stark and long-standing contrast among the city's different quadrants.





Focusing in on females in South LA, do you have experience with movements that call for women to generate wealth for other women?

No, not in my community. There are movements for a range of causes but not to generate wealth for women. On a scale of 1-10, I would rate the US at a 4 in terms of its support for women's issues. I am fortunate in my career and I have met a lot of women with a lot of influence who have been helpful to me. But in terms of policy issues that are of concern for a majority of women, we are at what feels like an awful moment. And while there is plenty of rhetoric in support of women, there aren't many leaders that have been able to push for gender equality in a real way



Since you are so familiar with other cultures, would your American 4 change if you compared it to other societies in Asia or Latin America?



Yes, I would perhaps bump it up a bit. In America there are at least mechanisms in place to voice concerns and to try to address some of these issues, even if painfully slowly. That does not exist in some other societies. Women in the US don't grapple with issues like femicide to the same degree that those in some other parts of the world do, for instance. It is the main cause of death for women in Venezuela, sadly. The position of women in China is exceedingly complex. During the Mao era women were said to have held up "half of the sky." The focus on gender equality resulted in major advances for women's education and in the workforce but women are still limited to varying degrees by strict cultural expectations. Chinese feminists are increasingly highlighting some of the more restrictive practices.

Is there somebody in your life that is a contemporary woman that inspires you?

Since I've had children, I generally look for guidance from women who have managed to strike a healthy work/life balance. I co-teach a course on China-Latin America relations at Georgetown with Professor Barbara Kotschwar. Barbara has managed to raise three remarkable children while also working in a range of high-profile positions.





Do you know what an Evidence Based Research Model is and why we use it?

Yes, I aim to use evidence based research in my own work. Research-based analysis is critical to informing good policy. Evidence-based findings are also generally more convincing than opinion-based ones, in my experience.

Do you know what convening is and why we do it?

Yes. In my work, I convene groups of individuals to discuss a range of topics. When doing so, I aim to ensure a diversity of opinion and to foster debate, all with the aim of devising informed solutions to enduring policy issues. I also frequently convene groups of researchers to compare notes and share key findings.

How would you define wellness in the community?



For everybody to have their basic necessities met so that nobody is struggling and there is a considerable degree of equity among all members of the community. Also of importance is that the community itself operates in a sustainable way—in terms of both human resources and natural resources.

Is there a place in your travels where you have felt the most wellness?

It of course depends on how we define wellness. There are many seemingly happy communities around the world. These exist even in some of the world's poorest countries. In terms of a community's overall health and wellness, Okinawa is something of a model. Okinawans live a healthier, slower lifestyle that has led to longer lifespans. Their sense of community has also led to greater wellness, as I understand it.



Do you have an opinion on whether food policy is interconnected to wellness?

Yes. Absolutely. Food policy effects whether, what, and how we all eat. At the moment, it is hard to know how best to proceed with industrialized agriculture. On the one hand, it is more efficient and can feed more people at a reduced cost. Food supply will also grow increasingly precarious as the climate crisis worsens. But prioritization of large-scale agriculture has severely damaged the environment and even contributes in some cases to climate-related challenges. In terms of sustainability, going local makes tremendous sense. Certain communities in the US are leading in the farmer's market and other local agricultural movements. I do think that it is the best way to go in terms of our health and the health of the planet.

Produced by Michelle Burton, Sergio C. Muñoz and Lisa Richardson

Sergio and Michelle are in service at The Social Change Institute at Community Health Councils in Los Angeles. This interview is a flower from our Leading For Equity Capacity Building Workshop created in collaboration with First 5 LA and Pacific Oaks College. Since beginning the workshops, we have initiated new collaborations with Dr Manuel Pastor at USC's Program for Environmental and Regional Equity and Dr Chris Benner at UC Santa Cruz & the Santa Cruz Institute for Social Transformation. Also with Melany De La Cruz - Viesca at UCLA and the Closing the Women's Wealth Gap initiative in San Francisco.

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