[00:00:00:560]

Hello and welcome to Origin Stories, a podcast by the Immigration Policy Lab that explores migration through research and storytelling. I'm Adam Lichtenheld, IPL's executive director. Across the world, migration has become one of the most contentious political and policy challenges of our time. With branches at Stanford University and ETH Zurich in Switzerland, the Immigration Policy Lab generates rigorous evidence and innovative solutions to help policymakers make more informed decisions on immigration.

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We also try to highlight the human stories behind the data. Our guests in this episode are Jen and Sherlene. Jen is a PhD candidate in counseling Psychology at New York University. Sherlene is Senior Assistant Director of Income Security Policy at the Ministry of Manpower in Singapore. Jen graduated from Stanford in 2013, Sherlene in 2014.

[00:00:55:842]

We'll let them take it away.

My name is Jen, I am from the Stanford Class of 13 and I was a psychology major at Stanford and did a co-term in Public Policy.

And my name is Sherlene, I am one year junior to Jen. I was the class of 2014, majored in economics, did an honors thesis in early childhood education and then also a master's in the Management Science and Engineering program.

[00:01:28:750]

Yeah and right now we actually both based in. Well we were born and raised in Singapore and right now we are in New York in Manhattan doing this podcast. It just worked out perfectly Sherlene's right now based in Singapore.

I'm based in Singapore and I've been there for the past eight years over years.

[00:01:52:530]

So I'm just back actually visiting family and it just so happened that family was in New Jersey which was close enough to New York City so I could come up and do this again.

Yeah, because right now I'm doing my PhD in counseling psychology at NYU, so I'm based in Manhattan.

[00:02:10:474]

So I haven't seen Sherlene in a while. Haven't seen Sherlene for-

Yeah, so Jen, do you want to maybe share a little bit about Singapore, this place that's so far away?

Yeah, yeah, I just remember that when I went to Stanford for my college, I wouldn't say it's the first time I was in the US but it was the first time I've been in the US for a prolonged period of time.

[00:02:37:690]

And I just remember during the international student orientation when they, you have to introduce yourself and you have to say like where you're from, right. And I say I'm from Singapore and people had a good sense of where it was but people only knew it very vaguely. I think it was worse when it was outside of ISO.

[00:02:55:946]

When I was doing the freshman orientation. It wasn't with an international student community. But anyway, Singapore was a pretty foreign country to people and I think the way I like to describe it is that it's a really small country. There are about 6 million people living in it.

[00:03:13:794]

You can drive from one end of the island to the other in about half an hour to 45min. And so that's like the scale of the country. And it's a pretty multi-racial country, it's very diverse. And our national, the first language rather that we all speak is English.

[00:03:33:430]

So I think it's always a little surprising to people when people ask me, well, what is your first language? And I say, it's English. And they're like, what is your native language? So I think people get a little confused. I don't know how would you describe Singapore?

Completely agree with you, Jen.

[00:03:50:226]

I think especially your point about scale of Singapore. I think that's at least me always been really sensitive about our size in relation to a lot of other things. And it's always on our minds to, every time there's a school holiday, can we see if we can go to a neighboring country or if we can take a trip somewhere else?

[00:04:11:474]

So Singapore is located along the equator, it's in Southeast Asia and the closest country you could easily go to would be Malaysia. And it's a very easy drive across a bridge into a new country. And a lot of people do that. A lot of people even have family who live across in neighboring countries.

[00:04:33:628]

Yeah, but I think that gives a sense of how many Singaporeans are constantly looking for beyond just our shores. Very aware of how we are really small. Very aware that there are so many other things out there beyond just that 45 minute drive around the island.

Yeah, yeah, it's actually quite true because I feel like growing up in Singapore, you know how in school they talk a lot about how Singapore is a really small country, how it's really important to be relevant globally and how unlike big countries like the US or China, sometimes you don't actually know Singapore will still be in existence after 50 years or 100 years.

[00:05:15:542]

So there was a thing that was instilled in us a fair bit.

Yeah.

Right, education system. You're right, school was definitely a very big part of our lives. Okay, it's of my life.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Go to school at like 7:00 in the morning nap a little bit before classes start, and then after classes you have extracurriculars.

[00:05:36:018]

Then you get home maybe slightly before dinner time, have dinner and then go back to the grind again to study, which was. So school was really like 15 hours a day. And only now thinking about it, for me was a big part of my life too. Because I'm just thinking about how when I first came to the US everything just felt so big, like the scale of like, let's say, road trips for like two hours, three hours, or like schools, the different types of school systems, public schools, private schools, charter schools, etc.

[00:06:10:156]

And I feel like in Singapore, most of these schools are public schools. And because we're so small, the government is so everything's so centralized.

Yeah.

So these school systems are very, it's very structured. You go into school and what's the maybe like a common core curriculum in the US, right.

[00:06:31:750]

But because of that you get a really good baseline education that really sets you up well for any academic pursuits later on, including Stanford. Of course, any academic pursuits later on. But I think the sort of the downside of it is that because we are such a small country, you lose out a little bit in terms of diversity of options.

[00:06:52:030]

Like, it's hard to, for the country to have to have enough of a scale to provide a wide variety of options for students, though I think it's a lot better now than it was 20 years ago.

Plenty of options, right. But it's a really interesting point because I remember coming to Stanford, like a lot of my friends, not just from different high schools, but different high schools from different states, and they learned different things.

[00:07:16:262]

Yeah.

So they all started, everyone started on different footings coming into Stanford. And so it also meant that introductory classes had to really be like trying to teach to a lot of different people. But I just wanted to build on your point, Jen, about the fact that we're all, most of us are on public schools in Singapore and the academics are very, I guess it's very nationally controlled in the syllabus.

[00:07:43:642]

But I think both of us had the chance to be beneficiaries of more pilot programs where they tried to provide more diversity of options to us to study. So for example, for myself, I was to skip a national exam so that it would give me more time. Time to do extracurriculars, to learn things that my friends in the regular academic streams wouldn't, and I think that was a really big part in opening my worldview.

[00:08:10:672]

Making me see, what are all the other subjects out there that I could think about? It wasn't just the regular English, math, science, there were interdependencies between subjects. What does it mean, in the way that I relate to the world, yeah?

Yeah, that's interesting because I feel like I was such a beneficiary of some of these non-mainstream programs.

[00:08:38:138]

My high school was in a math and science high school. It was the first specialized math and science high school in Singapore. And that was based off the model of some of the math and science high schools in the US. So that was my first time to get exposure to what the US system might be like.

[00:08:56:693]

Because my school was developed and its curriculum was almost based off some of the US models that they saw, so that was interesting.

I didn't realize-

Yeah, yeah.

And you were the first batch-

Batch, as well.

Of students.

Of students, yeah, so that was, what's it like being in a cohort of 80 people throughout in a new curriculum, and you're just being so exploratory?

[00:09:21:195]

How was it like learning? In the US, I think they teach differently, or the pedagogy is quite different from how it's being taught in Singapore. I felt the huge difference when I moved from high school to Stanford. And for yourself, when you started that a little bit early in high school, how was that like?

[00:09:36:336]

Actually, I feel like when I was in high school, I was too young to appreciate maybe the very deliberate pedagogical differences. But I think I'm thinking about how I did advanced placement exams instead of the A levels, which is what most Singaporean students do.

The Singapore Cambridge A levels.

[00:09:54:376]

Exactly, or like the IB.

Yeah.

Right, and by virtue of being taking the Advanced Placement Exams, my school year was a little different, right, it was a little bit more modular when I applied. It also sort of biased me towards applying to U.S colleges because they were more familiar with the Advanced Placement program, so I guess that's an example.

[00:10:17:866]

But I mean, I just think that the other sort of thing that struck me about the US, I mean in comparison to Singapore, was how a lot of social inequities exist at a very systemic level in the US. And how it feels difficult for folks to break out of it, and I say that because I identify as a first-generation low-income student.

[00:10:40:132]

So I remember growing up, I spoke Mandarin at home. And when I was sort of struggling in school, my parents would sort of bring the math problems to their workplaces and get their colleagues to do them, and then it would bring it back home. And that's how I learned because I would look at the answers, and I'd be like, let me figure this out.

[00:11:00:847]

Or I would go to school and the teacher really helped me to get my academics on track. And sometimes, I feel like Singapore runs very much on a meritocratic system, maybe as opposed to an affirmative action sort of system. And I'm not academic to say what's better or what's worse.

[00:11:21:166]

But I think my lived experience is that in a country that has a fair number of standardized tests along its way, the standardized test almost. And the meritocracy system was almost my way of breaking out of the arc that I see myself naturally going. So there was that system that set me up very well for academic success later on by giving me very good basics, and I think of Stanford as the place that nurtured that a lot.

[00:11:48:114]

My interests, and giving me the courage and the confidence to pursue some of these things.

Yeah, I absolutely agree with all of that. You know, for me, I think education, too, gave me a really good grounding and it allowed me the space to have dreams. The fact that I'm sitting here in New York City with you while you're doing a PhD is like, I don't think I would ever have dreamt of even coming to New York City before.

[00:12:15:372]

But I was never under the illusion that it was all or mostly me. It was like what you said, it was a system. The system really buoyed me up. I was lucky enough that the education system had already strengthened, I mean, Singapore was like 40 years old. And when I was growing up and education system had really advanced, I was lucky that I had parents who really valued education and the teachers that played so many different roles for me.

[00:12:43:237]

From guiding me in terms of value development, helping me through, I mean of course academics. But even the non-academic aspects of my life, and even exposing me to something called college admissions processes.

Yes, god.

Teaching me that you have to prepare for these things.

Yes, aww.

[00:13:01:462]

You can't just leave it to the last minute and guiding me on, okay, it's not just about choosing the best school you can get into.

Yes.

Choosing the school that makes sense for you and what you want to and what you might want to do later on in life.

[00:13:14:264]

Yeah.

So for that, I'm always, I think I have become very sensitive to the fact that I am the product of this entire system of support.

Yeah.

And I wouldn't be here if I didn't have all this.

Yeah, it's so wild. I feel like when I hadn't thought of that college admissions process, but until you mentioned it, Sherlene, but I think now looking back, I'm just like, it's so wild.

[00:13:37:968]

There's so many steps to get through, there's the timeline. I remember having to read these essays about how to get in and all of that right. Actually, Sherlene, I'm so curious, so when you came to Stanford after being in Singapore your whole life, what was that adjustment like for you?

[00:13:57:668]

Did you feel like being a Singaporean, that changed your worldview and coming to Stanford or what you decided to go embark on?

Yeah, coming to Stanford, strangely enough, Stanford wasn't really on my list of schools. I know this sounds terrible and it's a dream school for so many.

[00:14:17:224]

It was my dream school, It was my first choice.

I know, and I need to explain why. So Jen, you talked about kind of your parents bringing problem sums home from school. My family was very similar in that no one was really very with the US.

[00:14:34:133]

What we knew about the US was guns, violence, and sex and drugs, and drugs. Which of course is obviously a very, very, very poor caricature and stereotype, so definitely guilty of that. But I think what I appreciate from this is just the world is so big. Again, back to the whole, the world is so big, there's so much we don't know.

[00:14:53:386]

So having teachers and being in a place which encouraged me to ask why and why not helped me find my way to Stanford, and I'm so glad that that happened. In fact, coming to Stanford was the result of someone in an interview process. I was interviewing for a scholarship to study abroad, and my interviewer asked me, why didn't you consider the US universities?

[00:15:19:384]

And I realized that at that point, I had become so engrossed in researching for schools that my seniors and people in my network had been to. Which was the UK, China, Australia, that I completely didn't think about this part of the world. And that was a huge, huge omission and also a blind spot, so I'm so glad that that interviewer asked me why not, because I didn't have a good answer.

[00:15:45:926]

And I thought it's important to look at this because, in fact, actually, the environment I grew up in always taught me to look for options, always taught me to look for alternatives. So in some ways, they taught me that, and coming to Stanford showed Showed me where to find these alternatives and it taught me to grow that range of alternatives for myself.

[00:16:06:270]

Actually, it's so interesting that you say that because I think it made me think about how, in the admissions, I think it was similar when we did the admissions essay for Stanford. There was one on intellectual vitality, and I think your account is reminding me of how during my time at Stanford, one thing that I really took out of it was how be resourceful.

[00:16:30:042]

How not to always be bound to the traditional idea of thinking, thinking out of the box. So it's, I think when you talked about looking for alternatives, that's what strikes me and I feel almost like it was, I think back about the last, I don't know, ten years since I've graduated that I sort of retained that quality in me.

[00:16:50:853]

I like to think, sort of, when in various settings, right? At work or on a day to day basis working, let's say with the bureaucracy or against it in daily living, if things aren't going a certain way, just thinking about how to think about things differently to achieve that same desired goal.

[00:17:11:049]

Yeah.

Adaptability.

Correct, correct, that's right. This idea that I think coming to Stanford. And Stanford being one of the biggest steps I took in finding an alternative for myself, kind of led me down this path of even though this system that we've come from has buoyed us up so much.

[00:17:28:665]

We're now just more open and sensitive to questioning parts of the system that we grew up in, asking ourselves what might be alternatives that might be more suited for the times we're in now.

Yeah, cuz now I'm thinking about, I mean, Singapore tends to be a bit more of a rule-based society, a bit more traditional in how it thinks of its success pathways.

[00:17:50:243]

And I just remember when I went to Stanford, just first of all, deciding not to do an economics major, that was presumably more practical, but you're the economics major, Sherlene. I think I went into psychology, which was what I loved, you know, right? So not taking that decision or just even being more aware of, let's say the LGBTQ community, which at the point, I think, I mean, Singapore is not very, very good with looking at these different sets of identities other than the race bit, right?

[00:18:22:282]

So sort of it being like, right, it's okay to be a member of the LGBTQ community, to see how welcoming it can be, the allies. So there is that, I think on the personal front or academically deciding to a different major from what's traditional or I guess even our extracurriculars, right?

[00:18:43:257]

I did the Viennese Balls and the Viennese Ball Steering Committee, I did social dance, and I'm still dancing till today, doing social dance. And I don't know, prior to going to Stanford, I would have never thought that there would be the pursuits that I ended up sort of doing at Stanford.

[00:18:58:793]

So I almost feel as if going to Stanford, just that environment fostered a lot of micro decisions that were brave, at least for me back then. And brave because they felt foreign, a little uncertain compared to the familiar pathways that I associated with success. I don't know, Sherlene, did you feel like you have something similar, did you?

[00:19:22:887]

Yeah, Jen, I mean, this idea of Stanford fostering parts of you and giving you the courage to try things that you might not have felt you were able to try. Or explore back at home in Singapore is a theme that's really interesting because I don't know about you.

[00:19:42:246]

But I think coming to Stanford, I remember very vividly that rather because I was a product of a community, and I felt so strongly about that, I also felt that I should represent and embody whatever they had espoused.

Right.

And sometimes when there were aspects of myself that didn't really fit with what my community had been kind of talking about, or aspects that my community had been focusing my development on.

[00:20:14:576]

It really took a big step to tell myself, hey, it's okay to explore this aspect of myself. So, you talked about about LGBT issues. You talked about, stepping out and doing dance, and it becoming such a big part of your life.

Yeah.

I mean, those same things happened for me as well.

[00:20:34:515]

For me, for example, I always knew I liked economics. But I was never sure whether or not I liked it because my community told me that it was practical and because it was something that I had already studied in school and I was familiar with. And coming to Stanford, Stanford encouraged me to just take the time to explore many things.

[00:20:55:285]

And I think that telling me that it's okay to take some time to explore, was a big thing. I think because I was, I guess, an immigrant or a foreign student, I felt very vividly that my time at Stanford was finite.

Yes, yes.

And so what that meant was when someone told me that I had time to explore something, it was difficult for me to accept that.

[00:21:20:853]

It was like, okay, I have to. This is the first quarter I'm At Stanford. I almost need to make a decision now on which major I'm gonna do. But something in me was like, hey, you know what, we really need to. Sure, I only have four years here, but it's now or never, right?

[00:21:35:444]

It's either now that I try to explore a little bit beyond what I think my community has been saying is right for me or I just never do it at all. So I'm so thankful that so many people around me at Stanford told me take the time to explore, it's not a waste of time.

[00:21:49:841]

If you try say you know, a History class or you try Introduction to Symbolic Systems and you find that you it's not for you, it's not wasted time.

I feel you, actually, because I think one of the things that we didn't tell the listeners is that that in order to fund our college tuition, Sherlene and I both took on a scheme.

[00:22:10:923]

A fellowship of sorts that's I think a little similar to the ROTC program in the US, whereby the government funds your college tuition. In exchange, you have to return to the government after your college and get six years of required service. And I think that's why Sherlene and I both felt like our four years at Stanford was just four years.

[00:22:32:971]

And that also maybe dictated a little bit of our path, I think, our career pursuits going forward where after we graduated, Sherlene and I both returned to Singapore to work for the government. But back to your point Sherlene, I definitely felt like there was always this struggle between should I be more future-oriented in my thinking?

[00:22:54:962]

Knowing that I only have four years, I gotta plan, I gotta return to Singapore after, and how much should I sort of live in the moment and give room for that spontaneity to come along? And that was always hard. And now, I mean, right now doing my PhD at NYU, I don't have to return to Singapore right after, I don't have that.

[00:23:15:978]

But as an international student, I still face this bind a little bit because I still have to think about if I stay on the US, which I do want to, then what about the visa requirements? How many years do I have? So the future-present consideration always kind of being there.

[00:23:31:439]

You're right, it factors very strongly into-

Very strong.

Into trying new things. All these very practical day to day realities are always looming at the back of our minds as we figure out where we wanna explore next.

Exactly, yeah, but I think we both actually had very interesting pursuits after we graduated as well, right?

[00:23:55:270]

Cuz, I mean, Sherlene, I mean, it's typically both of us would have just come back. To Singapore to, to serve our time in the government but we both took a gap year of sorts right with the blessings of the government. But we took a gap year of sorts.

[00:24:07:168]

Rachel, you were in the World bank, which I thought was fascinating because it also built so much of your interest in economics. I don't know, I'm just thinking about how during our time in undergrad you would talk about your work with Professor Caroline Hoxby. Right, education and I was just, man, this person is really interested in economics.

[00:24:32:528]

She's not just saying it because it checks the box on the practical front and then you went to the World Bank and I'm just, like, what a badass, I don't know.

Yeah.

I mean, how did that even happen? How did your time at Stanford lead to that?

[00:24:47:939]

What was it like being a Singaporean and having all these experiences of making that jump?

Yeah, that's another really great point, Jen. I think examples from, from my Stanford experience that illuminate this point about Stanford, which was it just told you that if you tried, the Stanford network will be there to support you.

[00:25:07:946]

So true.

And really this work that I had with Professor Caroline Hoxby, this support that actually got me into the World Bank later on after graduation, without Stanford, I think all of these opportunities might not have come to fruition. So, for example, I remember for my work with Professor Caroline Hoxby, the Stanford undergraduate grant played a big part in that.

[00:25:31:776]

It sponsored my, my, my thesis, in that it let me go to Texas to collect data in a school district there. And because Professor Caroline Hoxby was supporting my thesis and advising it allowed me to obtain data that I probably would not have been able to obtain beforehand and allow research that had not been done before as well for this particular education program that I was interested in.

[00:25:56:251]

And the same thing happened with the World Bank as well. So going to the World Bank after graduating from Stanford in particular was an interesting one because Jen, you were saying that we were both in this ROTC program.

Yeah.

And we were committed to go back to Singapore to work in the government, what we call the civil service, a choice that we made, and I guess for me, I was very comfortable with.

[00:26:22:416]

But I, I know that at least 90% of the people, or most of the people at the time would go back straight away, after, after college.

Right.

Singapore directly, right? As opposed to taking a gap year, as opposed to taking a year or two off to try something else.

[00:26:36:993]

Yeah.

To work somewhere else, whether it's a nonprofit. And so making that decision or even making the effort to try to take a year or two off between graduation and going back Singapore to work, to fulfill my commitment was in itself something that took a bit out of me.

[00:26:55:941]

Because there were people that were saying, people in my own community who were saying, it's a great opportunity. But there were also people in my community who were saying, you probably want to get a head start in your career.

Exactly.

It's not a very common path yet, so you don't really know what's in store for you if you were to take a few years out in your early 20s.

[00:27:16:409]

But I have to say, if there weren't more encouragers than naysayers, I probably wouldn't have gone down that path.

Yeah, I feel you actually, I feel like for me, after I graduated, I remember just because by virtue of me sort of being ahead of you in one year, I said I decided on should I take a gap year to go to Interpol, right?

[00:27:39:062]

Just like, it's a little foreign, it's based in France, and I didn't speak French. And I just remember no one else in my cohort of people who took this fellowship sort of doing that and just thinking, okay, you know what? I should just go for it, right?. And just see what comes out of that sort of spontaneity and maybe even having that space for that spontaneity to develop and then letting that come to fruition.

[00:28:07:954]

I feel like it's something that I really took out of during my time at Stanford to enable this, and then to enable my subsequent sort of career path in the Department of Homeland Security in Singapore and then my work with the justice system. So that just shaping my whole trajectory, yeah.

[00:28:25:173]

Yeah, Jen, among the best things at Stanford for me, was probably meeting you.

Likewise.

She's one of my best friends, my best friend from Stanford. I don't know, it's just been 10 years. Has it been 10 years?

Yeah, it's been about 10 years.

We met in 2010, when you were a freshman.

[00:28:45:190]

When I was a freshman and you were assigned to take care of me as a buddy.

God, so, hey, what are you up to nowadays?

So I'm on break right now, but like I said earlier, I am based in Singapore now, and I'm still working for the Singapore government.

[00:29:00:977]

I've had the chance to work in different areas of policy in Singapore, both in telecommunications first and then in education, which was an area I always wanted to get into. And now I'm looking at retirement policy, and I guess I'm taking a break now, I'm back in the U.S to visit friends.

[00:29:20:681]

I also have family in the U.S.

Your husband's American?

My husband's American, lives in New Jersey, I met him because I took the whim. I went on a whim to go work at the World Bank after college. If I hadn't gone there, I wouldn't have met him and I wouldn't have friends, and I wouldn't be here in New York City because he was the one that dropped me at the bus stop so that I could take a bus up North.

[00:29:45:851]

Yeah, I mean, I'm still enjoying my time working in policy. It's just so complex, trying to figure out what's the right solution for a lot of problems that the world is facing today. In retirement policy, for example, one of the biggest problems, at least, is that we face an aging population.

[00:30:03:709]

So how do you help people save enough for retirement? Especially after they've worked 30 to 40 years in earnest, saving up money and now finding in a time of heightened inflation, that a lot of their retirement savings are eroded in value?

Wow.

Yeah, I mean, fascinating problems.

[00:30:22:073]

I'm so glad that I get to work on them day on, day to day. But I think you, too, Jen, you work on a lot of very interesting issues.

Yeah, yes, I think for me, right after my time in policy, I'm now trying to be a therapist, and I find that to be very fulfilling.

[00:30:41:080]

It's a career that I see myself in for the rest of my life, well, hopefully that pans out. I don't want to come back to this podcast 10 years on if I switch careers and be like, I said that, come back to Harvey. Anyway, it's actually kinda interesting because when I was in Stanford as an undergrad.

[00:31:00:566]

I just remember that I didn't want to engage in cultural research because I didn't wanna be pigeonholed as being from a culturally diverse population, being a person of color working on culture issues, I almost fits the stereotype too well but I almost just felt like culture issues just came to find me.

[00:31:19:369]

And what I mean is that when I was an undergrad, I found myself working on in the culture and emotion lab under Professor Jeannie Tsai. And then after I graduated, I thought, that's it I'm going back to Singapore and I'm among culturally similar people. But no, I come back to I become so much more attuned to these various aspects of cultural identity within Singaporean.

[00:31:45:000]

So it's maybe not necessarily just being not necessarily just race, but race also being a big component because it's multicultural, but also gender, age, disabilities, national origin, all of that. And. I just became so much more attuned to some of these talk about intersecting identities, but I think in Singapore, it just wasn't really the norm as much to talk about cultural identities and how it shaped your worldview, right?

[00:32:14:617]

Yeah.

But I mentioned all of that because right now, as an aspiring clinician, aspiring therapist, I find that to be very salient. And a lot of clients that I see, sort of understanding how did the place that they grew up or how did a disability, or how does their identity, maybe in race, in age, gender, how did that affect the way they see things?

[00:32:37:804]

It almost helps me to contextualize some of the presenting problems that they have, so, maybe if they present themselves, if they present with depression or anxiety and they talk about some family problems contributing to that, I can contextualize it with the cultural information that they're presenting. So, when I was 19, 13 years ago, I'm, let me run away from cultural research cuz I don't wanna be pigeonholed, and now I'm, I'm doing research on this now.

[00:33:04:570]

I, as a PhD student, I do research on culture and emotion, how cultural identities factor into your considerations when you see clients for therapy, and then I see that with my clients, so I'm, this it's so silly at the end. And it sort of brought it out to that social advocacy piece in me that I didn't think I would get into when I was much younger, yeah.

[00:33:30:295]

Yeah, and Jen, did you feel, because you spent a good chunk of your time after Stanford in Singapore, working in the public service.

Yeah.

Did you feel that that, not directly in culture research, but did you feel that that had some indirect or direct influence on kind of the path that you've chosen to take now?

[00:33:49:304]

Absolutely, because I think when I went back to Singapore, I worked with, I mean, with the Department of Homeland Security equivalent in Singapore, as well as the Ministry of Culture, actually, I think it sort of allowed me to see some of these interventions from a policy perspective.

[00:34:08:064]

What I mean by that is, for example, in the prison system in Singapore, you have maybe an overrepresentation of certain demographic groups, and you're well, how do you tease apart sort of the factors contributing to this, how much of this is because of the context with which they grew up in or not.

[00:34:27:714]

But okay, knowing all of that, how does that guide the legislation that you eventually put down, right? So that's from the policy side of things, but now from the therapist side of things, I'm just, all these systems are in play, and how is it contributing to the mental health symptoms that they present, and how can I work within the system that they provide?

[00:34:46:658]

So I almost feel like it's, or they're both along a similar spectrum, right, policy all the way down to downstream effects and how people live their life by these policy guidelines. I don't know if that makes sense.

Yeah, no, it really does, I think, what's interesting, especially about that trajectory you've taken, is that you've really been able to bring learnings from one place, even though it seems so unrelated, say, your work at the prison service.

[00:35:15:301]

And bringing that into the research you do today in psychology, in clinical psychology, specifically, what policies might mean in terms of individual ramifications and how policies shape the way that we view our world and we interact in our world. And so, how people interact in such a situation and what that means for, I guess, their psyche and how to support them to navigate whatever's happening.

[00:35:43:658]

Yeah, that's right, I think you say it better than I do, yeah.

Very cool, Jen.

I think the work that you do is very cool!