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Member Spotlight: Richard Lee, Ph.D.

Distinguished McKnight University Professor of Psychology and Asian American Studies, University of Minnesota; Chair of SRCD Asian Caucus (2019-2021); Member of Pipeline Task Force (2018-2020); Member of Task Force on Diversifying Human Resources in Developmental Science (2010-2012).

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Why did you decide to choose Developmental Science as a course of study or career?

I call myself an accidental developmentalist. I was first drawn to counseling psychology because I wanted to study the acculturative stress and challenges of Asian Americans growing up in immigrant families and then to help youth and families struggling with these issues. When I got to Minnesota, I began to study Korean Americans adopted transracially and transnationally into White American families. This work interested me because adopted individuals are an invisible part of the Korean American community. Studying adoption led me to the field of developmental science.

Who or what inspires you and why (and/or who/what inspired you to go into your chosen field of study)?

When I was completing my clinical post-doc at UC-Davis, I was fortunate to meet the godfather of Asian American journalism - KW Lee. KW was a community leader and mentor to me. One day, he pulled me aside and told me that US-born Korean Americans needed to speak up on behalf of their immigrant parents who did not have the King's English on their tongues. That message has inspired me ever since.

Do you have a mentor or mentors who have been instrumental in your career and, if so, who and how?

I have been fortunate to have so many mentors and guides throughout my career. To name a few, my high school guidance counselor, my Intro to Psych instructor in my freshman year of college (a developmentalist - Shari Ellis) who later advised me to apply to graduate school at VCU, my undergrad advisor at Boston College (Ramsay Liem), and my grad advisor at VCU (Steve Robbins). But in addition, these folks, many folks in the Asian American Psychological Association have been informal mentors to me in large and small ways, including Stanley Sue, Gordy Nagayama Hall, Nolan Zane, Christine Iijima Hall to name a few. And many colleagues involved with the Association for Asian American Studies and the SRCD Asian Caucus

What advice would you give to a Graduate student beginning their Ph.D. studies in Developmental Science or related?

I used to always say to graduate students to have passion and commitment in whatever you do. But I am starting to question this advice. Nowadays, I tell my graduate students that graduate school provides them with a set of keys. Grad school presents them with many different doors that they can unlock and walk through. As an advisor, I can give them advice and support, but they must unlock and walk through each door. I will meet them on the other side, but I cannot open the doors for them. This is sort of a metaphor for life in general.

What are some of your hobbies?

Well, my latest hobby/job is co-creating comics, but my other interests include (surprise) karaoke, camping, fishing, biking, and badly playing the guitar. I also help coach my son's baseball team.

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