

This interview is part of the **Southern Oral History Program** collection at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. Other interviews from this collection are available online through [www.sohp.org](http://www.sohp.org) and in the **Southern Historical Collection** at **Wilson Library**.

**R.47. Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present, and Future of Feminism**

Interview R-0895

Kabo Yang

April 20, 2016

Abstract – p. 2

Field Notes – p. 3

Transcript – p. 4

## ABSTRACT – KABO YANG

Interviewee: Kabo Yang  
Interviewer: Rachel F. Seidman  
Interview Date: April 20, 2016  
Location: North Saint Paul, Minnesota  
  
Length: Approximately 1 hour 50 minutes

Kabo Yang is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Women's Consortium. In this interview, Yang, whose family is Hmong, recalls her grandparents and parents' lives in Laos, and how her parents had to flee after the United States pulled out of Viet Nam because of her father's role helping the U.S. military. She recounts her family's time in refugee camps, and their adjustment to life in the United States after they moved to Saint Paul, Minnesota. She describes her childhood and teenage years, particularly focusing on the important role of a girlhood friend in her own coming to terms with her identity as a Hmong girl. She reflects at length on the traditional gender roles in Hmong families, and her own sense that they were unfair. She describes her father's journey toward becoming a shaman and spiritual healer in his community, and her parents' work in a local factory. Yang married young, and with her husband's support attended college despite her parents' disapproval. She describes her educational and career paths, including two graduate degrees and stints in legal aid, helping Hmong veterans obtain U.S. citizenship, and at the United Way, before becoming a consultant and then accepting the offer of the position at the Minnesota Women's Consortium. The MWC is a unique umbrella organization for all the women's non-profits in the state, and Yang describes the challenges it faced as it negotiated the changing terrain of feminism and social media in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She also discusses changing ideas about feminism within the Hmong community, and the role that social media plays in shaping those discussions. This interview was conducted as part of Rachel F. Seidman's research for her book *Speaking of Feminism: Today's Activists on the Past, Present and Future of the U.S. Women's Movement*.

## **FIELD NOTES – KABO YANG**

(compiled )

Interviewee: Kabo Yang  
Interviewer: Rachel F. Seidman  
Interview Date: April 20, 2016  
Location: North Saint Paul, MN

THE INTERVIEWEE. Kabo Yang is Executive Director of the Minnesota Women's Consortium

THE INTERVIEWER. Rachel Seidman is an historian and associate director of the Southern Oral history Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place at Yang's comfortable home in North Saint Paul. Warm and welcoming, Yang is very petite, but she plays a large role in her family and community. Her house had many folding chairs ready for when her large extended family comes over sing karaoke, barbeque, and play games well into the night. She told me she was looking forward to the spring and summer so that those gatherings could resume.

NOTE ON RECORDING. Recorded on a digital zoom recorder.

## **TRANSCRIPT—KABO YANG**

Interviewee: KABO YANG  
Interviewer: Rachel Seidman  
Interview Date: April 20, 2016  
Location: North St. Paul, Minnesota  
Length: 1 hour, 50 minutes

### **START OF RECORDING**

RACHEL SEIDMAN: OK, this is Rachel Seidman and I am here with Kabo Yang in North St. Paul, Minnesota. It is Wednesday, April 20, 2016 and we are undertaking an oral history interview for a project that is currently called “#Feminism: Speaking Up and Talking Back in the Digital Age.” So, Kabo, I’m going to start by asking you to talk to me about your grandparents. I don’t know whether you knew them or know them but if you can tell me a little bit about them and where they lived and what you know about them.

KABO YANG: I actually never met my grandparents so I don’t know a whole lot about them. What I do know is through my parents’ stories and they didn’t tell us too much, for whatever reason. I know that my dad has said that his father, my paternal grandfather, was a spiritual healer and so he was a shaman, well-known. He ended up having three wives. This is in the country of Laos. They were in a remote village in Laos and it’s a cultural practice that’s accepted to have multiple wives and he had, I think, three wives. My dad was a child of the third wife and he has several half-siblings that are all now deceased. They were farmers, spiritual healers. That’s all I know about him.

As far as my paternal grandmother, I don't know much about her at all. My dad didn't talk much about her. He's the youngest of his siblings and I think a lot of the storytelling was often left to his older brothers. He didn't tell us a whole lot, and my parents have both passed away. I do now cherish the times that we had together but wished I would have asked him more, you know, about my grandparents.

On my mom's side, my maternal grandfather was also a spiritual healer, a shaman as well, and he also had multiple wives. I don't know how many wives he had; maybe, two, possibly three. My mom is the oldest of her mother and she's got several younger siblings who are still here and alive, and so I do want to reach out to them. But, other than that, I don't know a whole lot about my grandparents at all.

RS: So, would a spiritual healer have been a relatively high status person in a community?

KY: Spiritual healers are often leaders in their communities because they're able to heal. A lot of folks seek them out and so they're well-known. They're well-respected and oftentimes because they're seen as leaders, they're often pulled into, you know, family mediation situations just because they're well-known, they're trusted, and so they do have a higher status in the villages.

RS: Then, tell me about your parents.

KY: My dad was born in 1949; my mom in 1951. Both were born in the country of Laos, different villages. They got married in the late-60s. My dad, at a very young age, ended up serving in the secret war with the U.S.—under the U.S. military. So he was sent off in his early teens, spent some time out in the fields, met my mom. They got married, had my oldest brother in 1971. My dad—they were both—it was a farming

family. My dad, from his connections in the military, he was able to get a small business going, just ox-trading, you know, various things. He was always—he had an entrepreneurial spirit, so he was always looking for things to get into. Then, 1975 was when the U.S. pulled out of Vietnam and Southeast Asia, and so we fled. My parents fled to Thailand to a refugee camp where my second brother was born in 1975. But, during the escape and where they were settled in the refugee camps, there were, of course, really harsh conditions for living, and I think the vegetables—the suspicion was that some of the vegetables from the garden were poisoned—and so my brother was born ill and quite a significant population of babies born that year were ill.

RS: Poisoned accidentally, on purpose, what's the—?

KY: Nobody really knows, but they used to talk of something that was in the food, just for that whole cohort of children born that year to be ill. Those that survived had, you know, short- and long-term disabilities. My brother, Pao, was sick. You know, he had physical symptoms. He wasn't eating well, was crying a lot, and so my mom was—because my dad was with his brothers, she married into a family where there were already several brothers and sisters-in-law and so my aunts helped her to take care of my brother, because he sometimes would cry for hours at end and they took turns caring for him, took turns watching him. Even in the camp, they were able to find each other and stay close together—my dad's brother and their families. It's also a very communal setting that they were in in the camps. I have a cousin as well, too, my uncle's daughter, also born that year, who also had some disabilities and some illnesses but hers wasn't as severe. They didn't know if he was going to survive and he is, he's still around. He does have some physical disabilities. He's not able to communicate verbally, but is vocal and

so he understands, so we're able to communicate with him in terms of us talking to him and communicating with him. He's mobile and he's pretty high-functioning. He's just not able to communicate verbally.

So, during that time, it was definitely tough in the refugee camps with my parents figuring out, not knowing what's next and debating if they should come to the U.S. or go back to Laos. But, my dad had served in the war and knew that he couldn't go back to Laos because they were looking for all the Hmong who were part of the U.S. during the war, and so they stayed in the camps for a few years. I was born in 1978 and later that year, we came to the U.S.

The stories they tell us of coming here for the first time—we arrived here in October and so it was cooler. They weren't prepared for that. You know, they pretty much—when they fled their homes in Laos, they pretty much fled with whatever they could carry on their backs, you know, a few pieces of clothing, some valuables; coming here, we didn't have any warm clothes.

We came here because we had families that were here that were going to help us settle in. So, we were able to get housing. They had to learn, you know, how to flush the toilet and use the stove and the refrigerator and running water. We arrived in 1978 and then in 1980 they both got full-time jobs and so right away, they were able to get some job training skills. They were in their late-thirties, I believe. My dad went to vocational school for a couple years and so they were able to still kind of start over. So, they both got full-time jobs. While they were in training and at work, the kids, myself and my two brothers spent quite a bit of time in English-speaking daycare centers and so we picked

up English probably before we picked up Hmong very well. My parents, they worked at their jobs their whole lives.

RS: What kinds of jobs?

KY: It was a company at that time called Minnesota Specialties and they made promotional products for companies. They made caps and aprons and tote bags and they would just put company logos on it. My mom was also a machine operator and my dad was a machine operator, so he did all the cutting of the fabric and so they were there. My mom was there. She retired in 1998 and then my dad retired in 2003, I believe. When my mom retired, she was making \$11.25 an hour and when my dad retired, he was making \$12.25 an hour, and even after twenty years, that's what they were making.

But, they were able to, for whatever secrets they had, save money, took us on vacations. So, after me, my younger brother was born in the U.S. in 1984. So, there were four of us. They bought a house in 1989 in St. Paul and we were able to enjoy the family vacations, family camping trips, quite a bit of stuff. But, you know, thinking back and realizing how much I make now compared to what they made, and what they were able to live on, I envy their lifestyle. My dad was very, very frugal. My mom was, too. She wasn't as overt but my dad was very frugal. He rarely bought brand-new clothes; often second-hand clothing. We would go out to eat once a week, and again, he was always very picky on where went; you know, cost-wise. He was also very creative, too. He often liked to pick up free stuff on the road, fix it up, find a way to use it. After they passed away, we were cleaning up the home; there was plenty of stuff, scraps, for us to go through.



My dad became a spiritual healer as well, too—a shaman—and what that usually requires is kind of a spiritual calling. A spiritual calling often comes in forms of an illness. I remember at a very early age, though, he often was able to identify herbs and roots and figure out what kind of remedies they had for illnesses. So, he was treating people for things like, you know, high fevers and coughs. I think for a long time, refugees, especially Hmong, were skeptical of Western medication and doctors, and so still sought out herbal healers and spiritual healers. So, he was sought out quite a bit in his early thirties, mid-thirties, late thirties. Then he became ill a lot; he would just get really tired and have symptoms. It was physical symptoms, too, but there were also some—what he believed were spiritual symptoms.

After several years, they sought out a spiritual healer to kind of figure out what it is and this spiritual healer said, “Well, you have shaman guides that are guiding you to become a shaman and you’re too young yet and so you need to stop the herbal medications and focus on your spiritual healing skills and gifts.” So, he became a shaman, probably in his early forties and mid-forties. All of my uncles, his brothers, were shamans and one was very active. The others were more kind of practicing as a way to just continue to nurture their spiritual guides, but not so much as a healer. So, my dad did a little bit of that but he didn’t do a whole lot just because he was working full-time as well, too, and it does take quite a bit of work and commitment to do it, to be active as a shaman. So, I grew up with a lot of spiritual ceremonies taking place in our house, kind of observing what’s happening, and for a long time, I didn’t really—I didn’t really get it and I didn’t really—I wasn’t really interested. But, as I got older, I became more interested. So, as I grew up around that.

He worked again until his company moved away to St. Peter. He considered moving with them but we said it's just too far of a drive each day and you can't be gone the whole week. It's just—you know, by that time, it was just him, my mom, and my brother Pao at home. Well, my youngest brother, Dao was at home, too, but we said, "You need to be here. We need you here in the city." My mom had actually retired after I had my son to watch my children and my brother's kids. She was concerned about us leaving them in daycare—the cost, but also she wanted to be the one that was taking care of them. So, she was home and so we said, you know, with mom being home and if you were gone the whole week, she can't get away to get diapers or whatever it needs and, plus, Pao does need care with bathing and cleaning, and so, just that.

So, he did end up quitting his job as well, too, and we thought that he would do more spiritual healing but he just didn't. He actually spent more time just fixing up the house and being with the grandkids. It's interesting because in our early years, my parents were more affectionate with us, hugging and kissing and saying, "I love you," and at a certain point, they stopped. I have vague memories of that and I have more memories of us being pre-teens and teenagers and always being scolded and, you know, lectured. But, then, I see him with my kids and he's—it's a very different personality. You know, you see him rolling around with them on the ground and hugging them and kissing them and eating their leftover food.

My dad is a very noble man. You know, for as long as I can remember, my mom would make three meals a day and she would set the table and ask him to come join the table and then he will come sit and eat, and then he would say he had to get up and leave and she'd clean up. Once the grandkids were around, you know, he would eat and he

would always have clean food. Part of being a shaman is, you know, your health is really important, so he wouldn't eat leftovers. He wouldn't eat other people's. He rarely shared food. But, with the grandkids, he would eat their leftovers. He'd eat from the same plate they're eating. You know, my nephew, who's—gosh, is he—he's twenty this year—was born premature and so he was a very picky eater. So, my dad often would follow him around the house and feed him as he's playing, and he'd feed him and then he'd take a bite. It was always heartwarming to see how my parents interacted with the grandkids and thinking back to our early memories of him doing that with us as well, too. They adored their grandkids.

They—you know, once my dad quit working, they full-time watched the kids and so my kids, I have to admit, are really good kids as teenagers and I attribute a lot of that to my parents and their values and the lessons that they gave to my kids at a very early age.

So then my mom just continued to be at home. Because she knew how to sew, she did some work at home in terms of bringing materials home to sew and bring back to companies and that eventually, as the kids—as more came because we ended up actually having—they actually having five grandkids, became harder to do. So, they just stayed home with the kids.

What else? It was always great having them around. They were—until their last days, they were both very independent, drove. They actually were pretty young when they passed. My dad was sixty and my mom was—no, my dad was sixty-two and my mom was sixty. But, you know, they were very family-oriented. My dad, the last probably four years of his life, was the only remaining of his brothers, the last one, so he

felt like he had a big responsibility for my brothers and all my cousins that he would have to really teach them some of the rituals of the family, traditions of the family, and there wasn't as much interest from that generation. He was getting really concerned and sad that a lot of these traditions would probably disappear because the next generation wasn't as interested in learning and so he was having quite a bit of stress in terms of having—well, he had that responsibility because he's the last remaining of his brothers, but also he couldn't get interest from the next generation, and so he was often concerned and even something as basic as language—you know, he was worried that we weren't speaking Hmong very well and that my kids, the grandkids, weren't speaking Hmong very well. They understood it and they could communicate very, very basically, but they didn't speak it regularly, and so those things were things that weighed heavily on his mind the last few years and the last few years, he became more ill. He had several conditions. He had gout and diabetes and high blood pressure and ulcers, and so he was constantly in and out of the hospital.

But, when he was out, he loved to be with family. He loved the outdoors, loved camping, fishing. You know, on weekends, it wasn't uncommon to get a call from him early on a Saturday morning and say, "Hey, let's barbecue," and he'd come over with all kinds of stuff and we'd often go to this park with this barbecue as well, too. My mom was just—you know, she just did whatever he was doing. You know, she was traditional in a sense that she knew what her role was as the wife and as the mother and often would support him and often didn't challenge him. So, they had pretty traditional roles in terms of gender roles in the Hmong community. But, it was interesting because even though my dad was more strict with my mom in terms of her role, oftentimes if a Hmong woman

marries into a family, she becomes disconnected from her family spiritually but also physically, and it's often not encouraged for her to visit her maternal family without her husband and without his permission. He—my dad was pretty strict with that. Even though he was close to my mom's family, I think as part of upholding tradition, he carried on that practice.

But, with me, he would call upon me. I got married when I was eighteen years old and he would call upon me and he was like, "Come over here. I need your help with this," oftentimes it was with paperwork. While he had some English skills, it wasn't very advanced so he would always feel more comfortable with me going over, just writing checks to pay bills, looking at bills, looking at paperwork, and he didn't really question if my husband was OK with it. He was like, "You know, I need you to come help me and so come help me." I ended up pursuing higher education and my husband at that time was fine with it but his family oftentimes was concerned that am I pulling away from him as I became more educated and so my dad would always advocate for me, saying, "If she can go to school and do good, then let her do it, you know. It's only to benefit her family and your family," and so he would always advocate for me.

So, it was always interesting for me to see how—what he wanted from my mom versus what he wanted from me, and just kind of the path in general when it came to me and so I appreciated that and that contributed to me really thinking about what I can do and what I can change since I had the support system. But, my mom was very loving. She ended up being a caretaker for many family members over the years who became ill. I think part of that led to her really saying to us that she didn't want to grow old, that she didn't want to live to be too old to where she needed to be taken care of because she had

cared for others and that wasn't an easy job and it was, you know, emotionally but also physically draining. So, when she passed away, she passed away peacefully, and abruptly as well, too, and didn't have the need to be cared for and to be waited on hand and foot.

So, the last few years, my dad became really the patriarch of the family and when I say family, extended family; so it's all my cousins and their friends as well, too. But, it was also sad that, you know, a lot of us—what he would say was being American and doing a lot of our own things. You know, we had to end the family picnic and we've had it for probably a couple decades and the last few years, attendance had been declining and he was getting concerned as well as my cousins had disagreements with each other, which affected kind of the family dynamic, so some would come to picnics, some wouldn't. We had camping trips as well, too, and those became kind of sporadic and then families—you know, nuclear families ended up having their own trips and so it became very scattered. So, he was getting really concerned and it saddened him quite a bit and when he was hospitalized and, you know, my cousins would come and visit him, he would—that's when he would say to them, "You know, I'm not going to be here very long," and he'd tell them how to love—to live together, love each other, be together "because once I'm gone, you know, this generation is going to be gone and we don't have an umbrella anymore to shelter you. You're going to be on your own and you have to learn how to work together and live together," and so he was always preaching to them about that.

We've been in St. Paul since we arrived. We arrived right into St. Paul here. We've lived here ever since then. My mom, at some point, did want to move away. The

cold was getting to her and, you know, she wasn't as close to her family as my dad was to his and so for her, she could have—she probably could have lived somewhere else. But, my dad was very close to his family so he wasn't willing to relocate. So my parents' home, our childhood home is still in the family. Right now, it's rented out to distant relatives but it's owned by my younger brother now. So, it's kind of nice to be able to get to my childhood home whenever I like to see it and we lived there since 1989 and so for my teenage years until I got married. But, yeah, that's my parents.

RS: Do you think—because you talked about the kind of traditional gender roles but at the same time—well, I don't know what would have been traditional unless—because your mom was also working. So, it's not traditional in the traditional U.S. way but did that cause any strain or changes in their relationship that she had to work full-time?

KY: I think it would have, but they worked for the same company and they were together, you know, every day. There was some tension at one point when my mom had to work second shift and my dad worked the first shift. Despite that, she'd get up every morning and make him breakfast and pack him his lunch and so while she was working, she still fulfilled kind of her traditional role at home. The tension came when she had to work because she worked, I think, four to midnight and when there was overtime, she worked until two or three in the morning, and sometimes my dad would pick her up and sometimes I'd go pick her up. But, my dad was always worried about, you know, who was working late with her but it was—it was a company where a lot of the employees were refugees and so, you know, we had several extended family members that worked there. So, I think being in the same workplace and also being with family

members and friends, there was this like, well, you know, she's around people and—but, my mom always handed her checks over to my dad. You know, he handled all the finances. But I think if it had been different where she was working on her own elsewhere, it probably would have caused some different dynamics for the relationship.

RS: So, how would you describe yourself as a child or growing up?

KY: I remember my earliest memory—so my parents began working when I was just like two or three years old and we were living in what's called a project. I don't know what the politically correct term for them is, but subsidized housing and so, you know, they'd go to—I don't even know how we grew up this way, but they'd go to work at 6:00 a.m. and my older brother—at that time, he is seven years older than me so he's probably ten or eleven years old. We would somehow get up in the morning, get breakfast, and then we just wandered the neighborhood, you know, and I had my childhood best friend, who—we're still best friends to this day—we'd meet up and we'd just wander the neighborhood, you know, and meet other neighborhood kids. I think because of that, I became really independent early on. So, growing up, I was always very independent in school, did well in school. My friend was always very supportive of me in school and, you know, I think having her—I didn't have any sisters and so she was always with me. I think it was when I was in kindergarten. She lived with us during the week and then—.

RS: This friend?

KY: Yeah, my friend. She lived with me during the week and on the weekends, she'd go home just because of transportation and childcare with her side of the family—with her family and so we became very close and we just did a lot of stuff



together. You know, we were just these two little girls who thought that they could run the world pretty much. We remained best friends all the way through high school, and so having her by my side kept me out of trouble, because I grew up in a time where Hmong gangs were really strong because they were, I think, the response to bullying, to racism that they experienced was to form gangs for protection. So, I think because I had her, we didn't feel like we needed to belong anywhere. So, I think she was a big part of me and her staying out of gangs and staying out of trouble.

We both went to the same elementary school, both were tested and sent to the same gifted and talented school, went to the same middle school and the same high school and so we were able to stick together through that. I think through that we were kind of supports for each other.

She was the oldest of—ultimately, I think she had eight more siblings and so she had a lot of responsibilities as the oldest one; often, you know, caregiver, babysitter. So, when she was with me, we could talk about other stuff, you know, about life and college. Even very early on, we were talking about college and career. Part of it was our teachers often encouraged us to think about what do you want to do when you grow up. I think as Hmong girls, we're often not encouraged to think independently and so we're often told you're going to be a good wife and a good daughter-in-law and you're going to behave this way. You're going to have long, dark, black hair and, you know, no dark lipsticks, no makeup, all that stuff. With me and her, being in the school, we were able to get—you know, teachers were really good to us and they would always encourage us to think about, what do you want to be when you grow up, and a lot of encouragement. A lot of

support from teachers, I think, so I have a very, very high respect for educators because of that so. So yeah, a very independent thinker.

I forgot this until several years ago, but I remember in fifth grade, we were probably two of maybe five Asian students in the gifted and talented school but we didn't know it. We just thought that we were just, you know, another student in the school. But, there was a group of boys that would play soccer after school and they would—once you'd leave the building, there's a playground and the field is across the street, and for some reason, we had the urge to go fight with them every day to let us play soccer with them. We'd go and we'd argue and we'd debate about why girls should play and why, you know, all this stuff. They'd eventually let us play and we didn't know how to play but they'd let us play and it was every day for months, and then, one day, they said, "OK, we're not going to fight with you. Just play." I guess we went, "Oh, well, that's kind of boring," so we stopped fighting, [Laughter]

We'd just sit in a cylinder. There are these huge cement cylinders; just sit and talk. I think having her and having each other just to kind of challenge us to think ahead and to think further. Her motivation was just to get out of her house. She said, "I'm tired of watching all my siblings. My parents want so much from me. I just want to be free." She was always thinking about her career and college and what path she was taking.

You know, I think for me it was her that motivated me. I think in my family I had just my younger brother so I didn't have a whole lot of responsibility as my mom, you know, pretty much was very nurturing so she did a lot of the stuff at home. But, you know, through her, I became very motivated about my career and college and what to do, and so in middle school, we got involved in a program called at that time "Minority

Education Program,” where it really took students of color and got them exposed to college and career and got some, you know, really customized help exploring colleges and career and if you stayed in the program through high school, you were eligible for a four-year scholarship to one of their colleges that they had in their partnership. So, we stayed with that.

I remember in middle school we were in—part of it was music class and the teacher was just—we saw that he would only penalize the girls in the room. So, it was a music class so we were sitting in these rows with instruments and, you know, of course, kids were disruptive and not always great to the instruments, but the girls would always get penalized. One day I think she and I—I don’t think we did anything to get in trouble but we walked to the counselor’s office and we said “We don’t like the way he treats the girls. That’s sexist. It’s not fair.” We were just talking to the counselor and just within like fifteen minutes, another female student walks in and says the same thing. She goes, “I don’t like Mr. So-and=So. He’s so sexist.” So, the school actually looked into it and I don’t know what happened afterward but I remember thinking at that age how we were so aware that kids were being treated differently. So, those are some things that kind of I remember as I think back to what kind of fueled my activism.

RS: Do you remember? Did you actually use the word “sexist?” Do you know where—?

KY: We actually said “sexist pig.”

RS: [Laughter] Do you know where you were getting that language from?

KY: I don’t know, you know. I think—I just think, you know, I can’t even—so I’ve gone through a few of the institutes and a couple where they had you do a journey

line where you kind of map out events that kind of shaped who you are, and I can't quite think of it but I know that there were, of course, cultural norms when it came to gender that we were experiencing. We couldn't go on dates. We couldn't stay after school and hang out with friends. The girls couldn't. You know, we had to come home right after school and be home. We couldn't talk on the phone with friends. So I think just from that, we were very aware that we were treated differently because we were girls and we didn't like that. So, as we got into middle school and these terms came up, you know—sexism, racism, all these things—we were like, “Yeah, it is a sexist practice and that's not right.”

So, we were very aware that girls were being treated differently and so applied it to the outside world. We were able to catch that early on. But, I think growing up, because me and her were such independent thinkers, we just were very aware when we were being told, “Oh, you can't do this.” We wanted to say, “Well, why not?” “Because you're a girl.” “Well, that's not a good enough reason.” Even though my dad and my mom were very supportive of me doing well in school, they didn't understand the need to stay after school. They didn't understand the role of, you know, social and extracurricular activities because they never went to school. To them, you go to school, you learn, and you come back home, and then you take care of your family. So it was always a fight to stay after school for dances, for sports, for anything, so it was something that we were very aware of. Her being the oldest daughter and the oldest child, she was always told to sort of prepare to be a good daughter-in-law, prepare to be a good wife. She said, “Well, I don't want to—I want to be, you know, a marine biologist and I want to be this.” “Oh, no, you're not going to be that.” She's much more of a dreamer and I

would say at that time much more ambitious than I was. She was always much more of a fighter and she had cable and I didn't and so she watched more shows that gave her this vocabulary. So, I would always learn a lot of vocabulary from her.

I think that's kind of where I came from and then, once we hit middle school, once we finished middle school, we went to Central [High School] in St. Paul and I think that's where we became much more aware of our race and ethnicity. I think up to that point, we were just kind of like, you know, "we're different because we're girls." But, once we went to Central, it was, OK, because we're girls and we're Hmong and we're Asian and we're refugees. So, with all this, our identities became much more apparent, because we would see the segregation in the school but we'd see other students that, you know, had similar experiences and we could connect to them in terms of being a Hmong girl. So, we formed close networks with other Hmong students in the school, became active in Asian Club, you know, continued to do well in school. We both ended up pursuing the Dual Credit Program that Central High School had and so we were able to take courses that were advanced that earned us college as well as high school credit, which was very—and which even now to this day was contested that, you know, a lot of times counselors in schools don't encourage students of color to do, because then they might not do well, which then makes the school look bad if the students don't do well. So—but at that time, my school counselor was very supportive. He encouraged me to take these courses and oftentimes I would be the only student of color in these classrooms. I was very aware that—and so I would often—I remember taking English literature. At that time, it was called "IB" was the advanced title for it. So, I would try to share my perspectives in my writing. I loved writing at that time and whether they were

short stories or poetry, I would try to share experiences of being a Hmong girl and what that meant. So, being around other Hmong students gave me confidence to be who I am as a Hmong girl but also as saying, you know, some things aren't fair as a Hmong girl and I don't want it to be that way. So even in high school, we had a close network of friends, many who I am in touch with today who are doing also nonprofit work and community-based work. So that was kind of the early years of high school.

[My friend] ended up getting pregnant at the end of tenth grade and, you know, getting into a cultural marriage. Because she was pregnant, it was frowned upon if you didn't end up marrying the father of your child, and so she ended up moving in with her boyfriend's family. It was hard for me because we were together for most of our lives and once she was with his family, we—I couldn't call her anytime anymore. We couldn't go out and do stuff. It was definitely a transition for me and I had formed other friendships throughout the year so I became closer to other friends that we were together with. She ended up doing full-time post-secondary, which is high school students taking college courses, so her junior and senior year, she didn't even come to the high school. She was at St. Paul College and at that time, we wouldn't have cell phones. We just had land lines and so I couldn't call her land line at her husband's family house because it wasn't—you know, it wasn't appropriate. So, we lost touch for quite a while. I developed more friendships with some other friends who I'm still close to this day with. I've always been able to find really strong female relationships, especially ones that have similar beliefs in terms of, you know, changing how Hmong girls are treated, getting equal access to opportunity, to education, to employment, and so I kind of just found myself with similar young women as well, too.

So, that was kind of growing up and kind of where—so I think back to just, you know, what fuels my activism with feminism and it's just being very aware that we're being treated differently as Hmong girls and expectations were very different for us, and then being among other Hmong girls who saw it the same way, who didn't believe it and who wanted to change it and really say, you know, if I can do it, I want to do it as well, too, and, of course, having strong support from teachers and counselors and kind of adults that way, really, about that time.

RS: Did [your friend] end up finishing college, having a career or —?

KY: Yeah, she actually received her two-year degree and her high school degree at the same time and she went on to have a career. She actually right now has gone back to finish her Bachelor's degree. So, she'll be graduating at the end of this year. But, she had a great career. I think her true degree was an executive assistant or executive administration and so she was able to work with a high-profile executive for many years and learned a lot from him and the good, the bad, and the ugly, but was able to really put her skills to use and so right now, she's finishing up her bachelor's degree, started a new career probably a year-and-a-half ago but has done very well for herself. She has—you know, her daughter is now in her third year of college. She continues to be very independent as the oldest of her siblings. Her parents are now aging and she struggles with how much caregiving she can give to them versus how much she can give attention to her career and her education. So, it's still a constant struggle that we talk about. What is the balance between, you know, caring for our family and caring for ourselves and how much of it is against cultural expectations? How much of it is

necessary? So, we continue to talk about that every day as well, too, when I see her. But, she continues to be, you know, driven and ambitious.

RS: Then, you went on to college right after?

KY: Yes, I actually got married in April of my senior year.

RS: Wow! So, how did that happen?

KY: So, after [my friend] got married, at the beginning of my junior year, I met my ex-husband now. I met him through mutual friends and we didn't really date. He was a little bit older. We didn't really date but we were always around the same group of people and we always would gravitate towards each other. So, it got to where we had our own personal relationship with each other and I think part of it was that he was older and so he was able to pick me up, you know, if I said I'm working and I don't want to see my parents yet. He'd pick me up for a couple hours and then they'd pick me up later. It's just being able to get away with him and just talk to him about kind of what I'm going through, because I wanted to go away to college and my parents wouldn't let me. They wanted me to stay at home and, you know, either get married or stay at home. They'd say "A young girl going off to college is really a bad thing. It's going to look bad for you. People are going to assume that you do bad things when you're on your own"; that kind of thing. They just were not even considering me going away to college and I wanted to. So, I actually began working. At age fourteen, I was able to join a program where I could work in the summer and at age sixteen, I started working and so I was always—I had my own money and was always kind of planning for my future. So he came at a time where I needed somebody that could be there for me and he was there for me. I think that spring it got to where I had to figure out what I'm going to do for



college. I have to—I can't live at home. I need to be on my own and just, you know, figure out who I am and what I want to do. So, he said, "Well, if we get married, you can do whatever you want," and so in April of my senior year, I said, "Let's get married," and so we got married. I moved in with his family.

My parents weren't too pleased because they didn't like him very much, but they said what can they do and so we got married and moved in with his family for a few months. Then, we got our own place about six months later and I went to the University of Minnesota. I only went part-time. I ended up working full-time to pay for the rent and for the car and insurance, and so went to college part-time for most of—I think all of my college career I've only gone part-time and worked full-time. So, I went and finished. After about two years, I had my son and then a year later, I had my daughter and so I continued my undergraduate program until 2004. I got married in 1996. So, it took me a while to get it, just going part-time, taking time off when the kids were born. I ended up moving from the University of Minnesota to Metro State, which I felt was much more appropriate for me as a—I think they referred to us as "student-parents" because they had evening classes and they had more flexible scheduling and I think for me it worked out well because I think at the University of Minnesota, being among a lot of younger folks, I didn't feel like they have the motivation to be there. They were there because they had to be there, where at Metro State the students were there because they wanted to be there. They wanted to come back and advance themselves in their careers and education. So, I felt more motivated there, and plus I was alongside at that time mid-career professionals so they had experience to share with me and to kind of—for me to learn from and so I actually did much better. I was much better off at Metro State.

Since I graduated in 2004, I took a couple years off and I ended up going back to graduate school in 2006. I wasn't planning on going to graduate school at all but I—you know, my undergrad was in business administration and at that time I was competing with MBAs to get management positions and I just—if I didn't get a Master's level I wouldn't be able to compete with others for management positions. So, I went to graduate school in 2006 and completed that in 2009 and then I took a couple years off but then went back to school in 2011 for my doctoral program, which I'm still in right now.

I became aware of management at a very early age and, like I said, my parents worked for the same company and when they were working different shifts, there was a time when my mom worked first shift and my dad would work second shift and there were times when they had the same shift and times when they switched. When I was probably in elementary school, my mom worked the first shift and my dad worked the second shift, and as soon as I would get home in time, I would take the city bus with him to the workplace and then I would hang out and then come back home with my mom because I always spent a couple hours over there. So, I saw that people on the floor were people of color. There were times at the gifted and talented school a lot of daytime activities for parents to come to—assemblies and fairs—and my parents could never come out there. I'd be like, "Why can't you guys come?" but "Oh, our manager won't let us come. We just can't leave work and come over there." I would always—so even then, I was like, "You know, if I become a manager, I'm going to let my employees go to their kids' things. Why not? That's the fair thing." So, it's kind of what fueled my pursuit of getting into a management position.

So, when I finished my undergrad, I just—it's like I can't compete with the MBAs, you know, for these positions and so I went to graduate school and really became interested in organizational leadership. Not just managing, but leadership as well, too, and not only in organizations but in communities, in families. And then having done my my graduate work at St. Kate's [Saint Katherine's University], understanding that there—that women lead differently and men lead differently and the outcomes of that are very different. So, that kind of added on to my interest in, you know, women's ways of knowing and thinking and leading and then changing how women are treated in the workplace and the community, in families, in clans. I was kind of led—you know, it's streamlined throughout my personal, college, and career life.

RS: So, at St. Kate's, what was the degree you were getting there?

KY: Organizational leadership.

RS: OK. Was that a part of the curriculum, the understanding that men and women lead differently or was that something you observed or—?

KY: I don't know that it was part of the curriculum but I observed it—at the graduate level, it's co-ed and so we had—in probably in every course, one or two men and then the rest were women. So even observing the different dynamics of how we responded to situations, of how we saw situations, then understanding, and looking at why do we see it differently and really seeing that, you know, it's because as—in a lot of the discussions, us women were much more team players. We're much more kind of—you know, take credit as a team and where the men would always say, "Well, you know, but if I did it, then I take credit for it." So just even seeing experiences of how they came out and saying, well, it's probably because, you know, we're men or we're women and so

just even in discussions observing how women responded differently to situations, how we analyzed situations differently and then kind of saying, well, why is that, why do we think that way, and then really saying, well, it's because we're socialized this way or we think this way. Part of it is just tied to our gender, so not so much part of the curriculum. I think they were observations of past discussion and just reflections, really saying, well, it's probably tied to, you know, how we as women were socialized or how we see things because of how we are and just how we lead.

RS: So, then, the PhD program is in—

KY: It's in human organizational systems and so it's kind of an intersection of people and systems and also the scholar-practitioner model and so it looks at not only the theoretical framework of leading but also the practical piece of it as well, too. So, it's actually based out of Santa Barbara so it's a very independent self-directed program and I looked up a few programs locally, too, but I was really driven to that program because it's—the institute itself was built upon social justice principles to at least say if you're going to create knowledge, it should make a difference, a positive difference in the world and they really look at very clearly understanding that academia has been very highly dominated by white men's perspectives and really saying this isn't—it's not as relevant today. They think there need to be more perspectives and so while we learn about these perspectives and these theories from centuries ago, what—who is it leaving out and who does that apply to and how can we change that. So, it really challenges us in the curriculum and for the faculty to really say there's a theory that is dominant, that is really, you know, kind of interweaved into a lot of practices today but it's not working as well. So, why not and how can we do it differently?

So, I've really enjoyed it. While it's a very virtual university, I feel connected to the folks because we do have a lot of shared interests in terms of justice and equity around race, sex, you know, economics, the environment, all kinds of stuff, and so we have that kind of passion, and the school itself does a really good job of keeping us connected. There is stuff around the country, around the world, throughout the year for us to connect with other folks as well, too, and the faculty are very good at reaching out, checking in, and I chose that program because of the intersection between scholar and practice as well as just between people and systems and just the social justice piece of it as well, too.

RS: So, it's interesting because a lot of the people that I've interviewed came through women's studies programs and you're coming from a very different academic perspective. How do you think that shapes your approach to these issues of feminism and women's leadership and—?

KY: I think I'm still trying to figure that out as well, too. So, I tend to use what I've learned through that—my academics—on issues that affect women and so when I do—so to facilitate other institutes, for example, among women and so I use the skills in terms of leadership and decision-making, conflict resolution, team-building, but I do it saying, you know, but as women, how does this apply to you? How does this – you know, how do you see yourself using this in the issues that you care about? How do you use this when you're making—when you're trying to create collaborations across nonprofits around girls and education? So, it's kind of using those skill sets in a different context and I usually leave it up to individuals to kind of understand the material and then look at ways to apply it that's appropriate to them and that's kind of how the St. Kate's

model is, too, is that they give you these tools and resources but then how you choose to use it, whether you use it or not, is really based on your kind of situation. So, yes, I tend to use what I have in terms of skills and talents in organizations, projects, initiatives that work on women's issues.

RS: So, what—I know now that you're at the Minnesota Women's Consortium but before that, what were you doing in terms of work?

KY: My career actually began in legal aid and so I was doing—I was a paralegal for legal services and our practice was immigration law and I was in my early twenties, probably my first realization of what it meant to be a refugee, an immigrant, and to really hear and see immigrants and the struggles that they go through in terms of resettling and learning a new language, a new culture, raising children in a new country. So, I did that for about—several years. So, most of my work was working with families, working on their naturalization, family reunification.

RS: Did you—I mean, because your family had lived much of that experience but did—this brought a wider perspective or a different—.

KY: My parents rarely talked about their hardships. They just were trying to get through each day. They were very encouraging of us, I think, from their own hardship to learn English, to do well in school. They'd say, "We don't want you guys to be working labor jobs. We want you guys to be sitting in an office, using your mind. We don't want you to be treated differently because you can't speak the language. We don't want you to be struggling because you don't read and write well." So, they were always pushing us very heavily in education. My brother—my two—my oldest brother—he was—I think he started here in fourth or fifth grade. So, he did well in school but he

didn't do as well and then my second brother had—has disabilities and so he was in special ed. programs all through high—all through school and I was always really, I guess, the better student and my parents—my dad—would always push me to do better in school. So, I don't even know where I was going with this.

RS: How that related to your job in legal aid.

KY: They rarely talked about their—I think in their minds, if we knew what they were going through, we might be—we might get stressed out and so they didn't really share their experiences. I think later in life, they did share how hard it was to be—to communicate with their bosses at work and to not be able to. But, there was one time where, you know, my mom was in an accident. We were—they were over at Menard's and some lumber had fallen on her, so she had broken her leg, and not being able to communicate that to their bosses and she actually had to go in to show them that she was injured and that she needed time off to care for herself. So, those kinds of things and my dad, you know, when he was kind of getting sick while he was manifesting his spiritual gifts, he couldn't communicate because he'd have to go in and show them how he was sick, so those kinds of things, I think; the things that they experienced in terms of being mocked in public because they were wearing the wrong clothes. You know, sometimes, my dad would wear women's shoes by accident, that kind of thing, and so they just, I saw this with how they treated my kids, too, they were like, "Oh, you're children. You don't know what it's like."

So I think they often didn't tell us what they experienced as refugees and once I got into that work, understanding how much work went into applying for medical assistance and renewing your food stamps—your food benefits and just these things that

they had to go through and how they offered access to all these community resources; you know, social workers, case workers. I never saw that. You know, they never shared that with us, and so when I worked with the immigrant families, seeing that they had to, one, come to me for legal aid, go to the social worker for benefits, go to the school counselor for school stuff, go to the medical—all these they were trying to navigate with very minimal language and understanding of the culture. You know, it brought me to ask my parents, “What was it like? Did you guys go through all of this?” and they said, “Yeah, we did.” And back then, there were fewer resources. This was the very early—late ’90s and early 2000s, so there were more nonprofits and community-based organizations who were able to help at that time. They really had nobody and so they said, “Yes, we—there were times, you know. Halloween came around and there were people at the door. We didn’t know what they were doing at the door and they were monsters,” and things like that, seeing snow for the first time and I don’t know how to shovel snow and I don’t even know how to wear shoes. They were wearing flip-flops in the winter; didn’t know how to buy shoes. I remember at that time the project that we were in, McDonough Homes, was not too far from the Kmart and we’d walk, you know, in the winter, all year-round, back and forth to the Kmart to get things and so they just—they didn’t really share with us kind of what they went through.

So, they didn’t become citizens until almost twenty years in the U.S. My dad for a long time—and it’s still a belief among a lot of older Hmong men is—kind of have this ideal for you to go back to Laos. My dad always reminisced about living in Laos because, you know, back then he had a status. He was an entrepreneur, had his own farm. He was sought out, well-respected. He was pretty savvy as a soldier. He was into



kind of get some relationships and respect among the military, and here he was a nobody. You know, he couldn't even order food at a McDonald's. So they really talked about kind of what they went through but, you know, me working with the families opened my eyes to see how much my parents went through and so really kind of grew my respect for what they sacrificed for our sake and really what pushed me to say, "I'm not going to just waste what they did for us. I'm going to really pursue education and career, make a difference for what they sacrificed for." So, up until that point, I knew that we were refugees and I knew that I had a green card, that I wasn't a citizen. I didn't know what that meant.

So, while I was working at legal aid was when I became a citizen as well, too, and I became a citizen during a time of—a bill was passed called the Hmong Veterans' Act and what it did was it allowed veterans to take a modified version of the citizenship test and also to have an interpreter. So, I was able to work with several veterans to get their applications submitted, to accompany them to their interviews and go through that process at the same time I was going through my process, and so my naturalization ceremony was at the same ceremony as many, many veterans. So, it was, of course, a big deal for me but also experienced then how hard it was as a young Hmong girl to get the respect and trust of older Hmong men and to the point where there was a partner organization that was really instrumental in getting the bill passed. There was a veterans' organization very instrumental in getting the bill passed; a lot of lobbying, a lot of work with legislators and so they then wanted to do a lot of the application process for citizenship, but without the experience and the knowledge to do so.

The bill, of course, had certain—had some nuances. For example, you had to have arrived at the U.S. from Thailand. So, if you actually fled and were resettled in France and then came here, you weren't eligible, or if you went to a different country and came here, you weren't eligible. If you had any kind of criminal background, it could expose you to immigration court. If you had any kind of flaws in your file, like if you arrived here as a married person but are now no longer married but you don't have a divorce decree, that's an issue; like you need to still list yourself as married on your application; those kinds of things that the organization wasn't equipped to do because that's what they—wasn't what they worked on.

So my organization—we tried to really be partners and say we can do the screening to which are eligible so that we don't expose anybody, you know, inappropriately to the Immigration Service and just, like, you know, we do this; we can do it ourselves. There were times where I would go and sit outside of their office to intercept people as they come in. I'd say, "My name is Kabo. Here's what I do. If you want my services, that's free. You know, if you're eligible for the service here, it's free and here's what I can do for you." So, that was kind of my first experience directly with kind of the cultural perspectives, and women, but also young women, and really fighting with—and there's also like a military leadership, too, that I was also dealing with that I wasn't experienced with, the hierarchy of, you know, the ranks and who I was talking to, who I was dealing with.

So, I really just—it was a learning experience for me but through that really appreciated what my parents went through and what all the elders went through in our community and a lot of—I still do—I do quite a bit of pro bono work for the veterans'

organizations in terms of planning and fundraising. But, it wasn't until then in my early twenties that I realized what it meant to be a refugee, what my parents went through.

I was there for a few years. I think because I was younger, too, and wasn't probably as emotionally mature, I took a lot of my clients' problems and I just became sick a lot. I was probably taking, you know, headache medicine every day and at one point, I started having some really severe headaches and my doctor had advised me that I need to either reconsider my career or that I would probably be sick for a long time. So, that and, at the same time, my position was being reduced because of funding purposes, so I ended up leaving there. I was there about four years. My daughter was about four by then because I started right after she was born.

Then, I ended up at United Way and at United Way as an executive secretary. I ended up being at United Way for almost eight years and while I was there, taking on several different positions. I was fortunate, over the eight years, I had four different bosses and each boss was very supportive of me personally and professionally and so they gave me opportunities within the organization actually to really exhibit but also explore and develop leadership skills and my network as well, too. Through United Way, I was able to really—and I was at United Way as I was going through my graduate program in organizational leadership as well, too. So, I could really look at what I was learning and how it was showing in the workplace. United Way at that time was big enough to really have a lot of things going on, plus the model that I could really get access to different departments, different leaders, and so through that I really—I tell that I grew up at United Way because I really learned about leadership, about organizational

politics, about all kinds of nonprofit functions, fundraising, marketing, communications, finance, HR there, and a wide network of nonprofit colleagues.

So, I was there for about eight years but I was in a position where I was at middle management and to go from middle management to the next level took ten more years of experience and I said I just can't be here for ten more years. I just—I needed to do something more. So, I started—and while—my last couple years at United Way, I started doing some part-time consulting. I had met a Hmong woman who was a consultant and because we shared interest in organizational leadership and organizational development, she gave me—she subcontracted with me on some things and kind of helped mentor me through a consulting process. You know, how do you work with organizations? How do you assess the project? How do you cost it out? How do you—you know, what is a project plan for each project? So, she mentored me into doing that.

So, when I left United Way, I started consulting full-time, and I had a couple—my first year or two, I had full-time contracts and so I was able to do that and then do some part-time contracts as well, too. So, I did contracts in—working with mostly nonprofit organizations around relation development, board governance, strategic planning and team development. So—and I decided to work mostly with smaller organizations and immigrant and refugee-serving organizations and I wanted to do that just because I felt like I could bring a perspective to the work that I could have in mind as I was doing the work who the constituents are. So, whether it was fundraising or relationship planning, I always had in mind the audience that we were serving. So, I was able to work with several nonprofits locally. My board service, again, was very specific to small nonprofits with a belief that, you know, if I could—that I could probably do

more for a smaller organization with what I bring than a large organization where it's more of a governing board.

So, so my career has just really been in nonprofit but, you know, as I became more aware of who I was and what I cared about became more targeted to smaller organizations, nonprofit refugee organizations, and coming from a woman's perspective and saying, "Here's how it affects women," or "Here's a woman's lens on this issue or this program," and then just kind of getting involved with different networks of women in really finding that peer support and learning from other women who've been there is probably the most vital thing that I can learn in my own growth, so really building relationships with other women, particularly women of color, kind of whether ( ) in terms of navigating workplace politics, and community politics, and cultural politics but also balancing family, and work, and school, and community, and what that might look like.

So, it's been like a really supportive network that I began to develop and I just, you know, started to share about how—why this, you know, why seeing that in leadership positions in nonprofit and corporations are still predominately white men and why is that the case and how do we get more women into those positions and how do we get more women of color into those positions. So, that became an interest for me in graduate school but also more in my doctoral program as well, too, but, but just also, I mean, even in all that I've done just being very aware of the lack of women in certain spaces. I was very involved with a lot of boards out of community groups, you know, committees, task forces, roundtables and often being the only woman of color in the room and just being very aware that I'm the one that's different here and always being mindful that my perspective was not going to be easily understood but it needs to be heard and,

you know, eventually finding my voice and being comfortable enough to share that voice in those spaces.

RS: Then, was it from the consulting—is that when you moved to the Women's Consortium?

KY: I was consulting, actually, really enjoying being able to work with different organizations, understanding different leadership styles, different organizational structures. I really liked it. I was keeping pretty busy. I had known the Consortium. For several years, I was on the board of a member organization.

RS: Which one was that?

KY: Galore Professional Hmong Women's Network.

RS: What? Say that again.

KY: It's Galore.

RS: G-A-L-O-R-E?

KY: Yeah.

RS: OK.

KY: Professional Hmong Women's Network.

RS: OK.

KY: It began as an association. So, it was an individual, member-based organization of Hmong women who are business owners and they were members of [ ] and chambers but I thought they weren't being supported in terms of being Hmong women. So they began to come together as a group saying, you know, yes, we need this because in terms of marketing, communications, but what about being Hmong women and balancing family? We can't go to happy hours because it's not culturally appropriate

for us to go to happy hours with strangers and to do these things. So, they began to come together on a monthly basis to support each other but also just to share resources. So, they began as an association where it was just paid membership dues and they would get, you know, on a monthly basis some kind of opportunity—networking opportunity. Then, when I joined, they were transitioning from an association to a nonprofit because they wanted more women to have access to their services. So, it has—it's still around to this day and it exists as a volunteer-run organization. The board does all the work of it and so I was on the board for six years. So, we were a member of the consortium. We used their space quite often, we didn't have a physical location, so we used their space for board meetings, for our events. So, I had a chance to work with Bonnie, with Erin, and with Lorraine over the years and participated in some of their "Day at the Hill" events, went to some of their workshops. I became familiar with the team and, as I did more work with some of the member organizations, became familiar with other member organizations.

So, when the position came up, they did a first-round search at the end of 2014, had an executive search team do it. An executive search firm did the search. I don't think there was anybody that first round, they didn't end up hiring anybody. The second round, in the spring of 2015, they were doing some membership interviews just to kind of say "Who's the right candidate, what kinds of skills would be appropriate for this position. Do you have anybody in mind?" So, Galore was one of the organizations being interviewed and when I met with them, they said, "Well, you know, your name has come up several times as well, too, and you're here and would you consider applying at this time?" I said, "No, I just—," because at this time last year was when we had the

interviews and I had just finished a benchmark in my PhD program to move into my dissertation, plus I was actually very busy with my consulting work. So, I said to them, “I don’t know where I’m going to be in six months. I don’t know what’s going to happen with my studies, with my consulting, so I just can’t apply right now.” So, I didn’t apply.

They did end up finding somebody but I think the negotiations when it came to salary just wasn’t right and so she didn’t end up taking the offer. So, then, in July or June or July, they came back to me and said, “We didn’t get—you know, with the second round. We are now handpicking people to apply for the position and you’re one of them. Would you consider at least applying and meeting with the board and staff and just kind of hear where we’re going and see if there’s some kind of match?” So, I said, “Yeah, you know, I think I could do that,” and so went through their process, met with the board and with the staff, was really interested in where they were going; you know, what they were thinking and just kind of how they were going to do it. You know, the consortium at that time was thinking about engaging a more diverse audience. They were very—the board is very aware that the organization has been doing quite a bit of work on women’s issues but has been doing it through the lens of white women and really saying how do we include women of color, immigrant women, low-income women, trans-women, and so they wanted to look for ways to engage and get a more diverse perspective in the work that they were doing and understand that it wasn’t going to be easy and it’s going to take time to build relationships, to build trust, to learn about communities, to learn about what these issues look like in different communities. So, just the appreciation that it’s going to take time and that it’s not going to be—there’s no clear-cut way to do it and that it might



not be accepted by everybody but it had to be done was what I appreciated about the board being open to that.

Also, at that time, I was thinking, you know, my son is driving; the daughter is going to be driving soon. They don't need me at home as much anymore. I had split from my husband about two years ago and so I was thinking, well, they don't need me as much. They're pretty independent now so I can go back in the workplace and my thinking was also, too, I was doing quite a bit of individual organizing on women's issues but I was thinking I could probably do more with an organization that has a reputation for that. I could probably have more traction, have more resources. So, that combined with maybe I'll go back to the workplace was just—it came about at the same time as they came back to me in July and said, "Well, let's do it."

So, it took a while. The transition took a couple months because I was still doing some consulting work and so I started in mid-August and had done full-time in October because I wrapped up some consulting work and then I also started teaching in the fall as well, too, just on an adjunct basis. I was consulting for several years and then just to the consortium, and then now I'm also teaching part-time as well.

RS: So, what are you—what are your hopes for the consortium?

KY: You know, what I—so they had asked because one of the questions was what is your vision for yourself and what is your vision for the consortium and I was thinking my vision for myself and part of my interest in doing a lot of work around immigrant and immigrant integration is understanding the role of immigrants in the U.S. but then also across the world as well, too, and that, you know, the immigration policy was in the 1960s—brought in a different wave of immigrants from Latin America, from

Asia, and from Africa, which was very different from the first great wave of the 1920s where it was mostly European countries and really understand that there's a different integration process for this population and the first population just because of race and culture differences so—and then how that shows up then in the education system, in the workplace, and communities and politics.

So, as I did more research on that, I saw that there were immigrant integration centers, academic research centers throughout the West Coast and East Coast but not here in the Midwest, despite the Midwest having some of the gateways of immigration in the nation, so I wanted to long-term have some academic research center that was done—that was by immigrants, about immigrants, for immigrants so to look at integration strategies, the outcomes of several generations of immigrants and the immigrants in the U.S. actually contribute to their home countries financially and culturally. So, I want to have research that's being done by those who are going to be affected, whether it's women, immigrants, whatever the case may be and remain aware that many immigrant communities from the 1960s and until now have very different gender dynamics in each cultural community and that affects then their integration process and so wanted to integrate the role of women into the research center as well because I want to have a future for me running an outreach center that's community-based, community-driven and then, too, how that then shapes policy; you know, whether it's national or local policy and then really then looking at the socioeconomic outcomes based on the policies, based on kind of what I'm learning from the research.

So, for the consortium, I want to see something very similar where we are creating and developing, learning about knowledge that affects women and respecting

women. How does that then shape policy and how does that then improve the lives of women in general? So, just even kind of that alignment was very strong between myself and the consortium and then just my passion to really be community-based, to say, you know, if we're going to look at policy that's going to affect the people, they should be part of the process and, actually, for me, I believe that issues and solutions are in the same place but how do we get in there and provide resources to help them get to those solutions? So, a big piece of what I want to do for myself but also for the consortium is to really get into communities, be invited in, be trusted and to really see what does violence against women look like in your community, what does—you know, how does the unequal pay affect women in your community. It's really saying understanding because it looks different in different cultures, communities, and ethnic communities and so kind of just that alignment was really strong. So, I do want the consortium to really be much more research-driven but also in terms of understanding and gathering, we sponsor creating research as well, too, that's informed by and led by communities and use that to then shape and form and create policy and then, you know, also to improve lives of women in the state. So, that's kind of my vision for the consortium.

RS: That's really great. How are you planning structurally to do that? Who will do the research and—?

KY: I've been there about six months and there are just three of us. There is myself. I'm in the associate director position and then director of finance and administration and the associate director position is now vacant.

RS: Which one?

KY: The associate director and so that position was kind of created abruptly because, you know, Erin had left and so I had to kind of take over everything. So, the position was created to kind of keep the organization going and cover everything from, you know, communications to marketing to fundraising to event planning to all kinds of things. So, after the individual left, which I had known when I was brought on because he was relocating for law school, it meant creating two positions to kind of take over that position, and so one is a membership and communications specialist because I, too, feel like we need to be much more engaged with our members and really be advancing their work as well, too, so really looking at what issues are members working on, who are they serving, how are they serving them and so how do we support that? How do we advance that? So, the membership and communications position will focus primarily on membership. Then, because membership is one revenue stream for us to then look at what other revenue streams can we be looking at in terms of individual giving, foundation grants, state contracts that kind of a membership/communication development position and the second position is a policy specialist. That position will be doing more of the research and how that then shapes policy and how does that inform what our position is on certain policies.

So, that's kind of like the short-term, and long-term I do want to look into expanding the organization and getting in and I don't know that we want to be doing the research ourselves but really look at who is doing the research and how do we either inform it or how do we connect them to communities that are going to be affected by the research. I think we'll be doing some research on some things but I think more of it will

be doing kind of interpreting research and applying it to policies that affect women in Minnesota.

RS: That's really neat. Let me think. I know one of the things that Erin was talking about last night was the struggle for the organization, the consortium, to kind of come to grips with the new world of social media. How have—how do you see social media being utilized by the communities that you're talking about and what do you see as the role of it for the consortium?

KY: I am actually sort of new to social media. I primarily use Facebook and I've been able to learn better how to use it to kind of clarify where I stand on as an individual. So, for example, last year, right when I was, you know, being put for the consortium, there was—so there are maybe two or three news channels that are run just primarily through YouTube—Hmong news channels that are run through YouTube, and they share news and current events but also kind of what's happening in the Hmong community, and there was one anchor, an old Hmong man, and he just went on a long rant about women, how women are bad, and so for fourteen minutes, I watched about—you know, I ended up watching it all but I just—but he went on to say, you know, Hmong women are bad. If they've divorced, it's their fault. If they're widowed, it's their fault. They need to bow down to their husbands. They need to—so it was just—he just went on for a long time and, you know, a lot of times I don't pay attention to that stuff. You know, it's just somebody that needs attention. So, it was being, of course, shared on Facebook all day, all day, all day. For the next twenty-four hours, it was just—you know, there were all kinds of reactions, both positive and negative. You know, there

were those that were like, “Oh, he’s so right.” I’m saying, “What’s wrong with this man?” and back and forth.

RS: This is within the Hmong community?

KY: It was in Facebook and a lot of the comments were, of course, from the Hmong community and the Twin Cities here. So, I got a couple messages from people who know that I am passionate about women’s issues who said, “What are you going to do about this?” At first, I was like, I’m not going to give him the attention that he doesn’t need. You know, he doesn’t—it’s not worth it. But, I was seeing so much emotion come out of it, both really hurtful emotion and both very just—I think there are times when people thought they had permission to either say he’s right, women are bad, or to say this can’t be happening. This can’t be happening. So, I was like, you know, I’m just going to—instead of giving in to him, I’m going to divert the attention to positive Hmong women images. So, the next day, I posted a selfie, which I rarely do, and I said, “Let’s plaster Facebook with positive images of Hmong women because he doesn’t deserve this. We deserve the attention,” and I didn’t know what was going to happen. I hashtagged it and—.

RS: What was the hashtag?

KY: “HmongWomenStand2Gether.” Then, in about a week, over 100 women from across the country did the same thing. They hashtagged it. A local—well, it’s actually an organization called Hmong Women Today that started in California but has a Twin Cities branch picked it up on their Facebook group and they shared it with their Facebook and they have thousands in their network. Another nonprofit—so Galore started share it as well, too, to their network, and so over the period of a week, we had

hundreds of women just posting up their pictures and saying, “My name is So-and-so. I’m a married Hmong woman, divorced Hmong woman, single Hmong woman, here’s what I do,” and they just—you know, and so I—and I was like, you know, we just need to—it’s easy to be drawn into that kind of media attention and so how do we continue to—and part of why he did what he did was because there were no positive images of Hmong women. There wasn’t any kind of—anything that was countering him and so we’re going to counter him. So, I do see social media as a way to really kind of get this kind of—kind of get—and so—and I didn’t know—most of these women, I never knew them. So, just—and I received so much disappointment of people saying, “Wow, why are you so self-promoting yourself that way? That’s so bad,” but we got so many more saying, “Oh, my goodness, what an inspiration. It’s so great to see women doing such amazing things.” We had women who were physicians and state attorneys and county attorneys and physicians and it was just like—and then we had stay-at-home moms and we had just a wide range of women who were like, “Yeah, this is why I do this. This is who I am and I love it,” and so a lot of younger women saying, “I just—this really inspires me to do more. It’s just great to have these images of these stories to inspire me.”

So, we certainly have social media as a tool to really inspire or—and I choose to use it to inspire. So, I do see social media as a way for the consortium to really get our message across in terms of, one, educating, but also inspiring as well, too. I think our challenge right now is we haven’t really developed kind of what our—what that is, is how do we—what do we educate on and how do we inspire. I think as we do that we do want to use social media much more to reach an audience. Right now, we have, you

know, not a huge following. What I'm learning is that our supporters over the last thirty-six years are much older and aren't as savvy with social media and so we still have literature that we send out to them and so it's also—so one of my priorities for the next year or two is to really engage younger women in the consortium as well, too. So, as we kind of figure out who our audience is and what's the best way to reach them, then we'll probably figure that out. We'll probably be more in touch with our social media usage. We just haven't—we had an intern this spring. She just finished last week that did an integrative marketing plan for us and so she set us—she set for us—she kind of looked at who, through our social media posts, who's responding, who's reading, geographically when she can look at demographics of who's following our stuff and then from that, she's going to create some benchmarks for us to really say, you know, acquire so many followers every so months and to do those, here are some things you can be doing so really learning about how to use social media. I do see it as valuable, but it's also very critical that we do it correctly because it certainly can rub people the wrong way and then be prepared for how to respond to that as well, too, to respond to critiques, respond to feedback. So, I think as we develop more capacity internally, I think it's critical that we do get social media as one of our major strategies for communicating.

RS: I'm interested in, well, kind of two things. The passage of the Women's Economic Security Act a couple of years ago is really quite remarkable compared to what's happening nationally and I learned about it more from talking to Aaron last night. I understand that there's still more that needs—you know, that people are trying to work on to continue. Will the consortium—first of all, do you think that having the



consortium, this long history of the consortium, thirty-six years of women organizing in Minnesota played a role in being able to get that passed? Is that your understanding?

KY: I think my understanding was that it was a coalition of organizations and that the consortium was one of the conveners.

RS: Do you see the consortium continuing to play a role in advocacy in that kind of way on those kinds of new bills?

KY: I do. So, we just put on our third Women's Economic Security Summit and—.

RS: That's sponsored by the consortium?

KY: It's—it was—so this year, it was coordinated by the consortium along with the partners and so the first year that it was put on, I believe it was—I think I believe it was a more collaborative effort with all the partners of the coalition. The second year was pretty much led by the Legislative Office on the Economic Status of Women and then this year because Barbara just had the capacity to, the consortium took on the role of convening the partners.

RS: Barbara—.

KY: Battiste. So, she's with the Office of Economic Status of Women. So, she did it last year, kind of on her own. I mean, she convened the partners and coordinated the planning but she pretty much led the process. So, this year, the consortium took on that role. So, we convened the partners. We ended up doing quite a bit more work than the partners just because everybody else had so much going on and so we were able to take the feedback from last year and instead of doing kind of a handpicked panel session, we had a community RFP process and so we sent out a request for proposals from—you

know, to our network and to the partners that work to say we're looking for panels. Well, first we did a survey to the attendees from last year and to—and then we had our partners just share the survey across their networks to say, “What are the top economic issues facing women that you see?” and so from that, we had a list of topics.

So, then, we set up our RFP. We're looking for panels that are community-based to present on these topics. What does it look like in your community? What are some that you see and what can be done about it? So, we received some panels and so this year's presentation was panels that were formed by communities and they talked from a community perspective. So, that was—so we continued and we actually debated about doing it or not because nobody had the capacity to really put that—it's a pretty big summit, about 250—250 attendees. Just, the coordination was a lot of work and so the consortium—we debated if we were going to take it on or not. It was—you know, we have to keep WESA going. So, part of—so we had to continue. So, we do want the team to kind of have that summit to really share education. We're able to attract quite a bit of legislators there to speak and to also attend. We actually had it at this new Senate building and so—and we had it the week before the session began. So, some legislators were already in the building. So, we had a really good turnout in terms of both sides of the aisle that came and supported, that came and spoke. But, we also know that there were several aspects to WESA, you know, family caregiving, equal pay that others are already taking on so we don't want to duplicate any efforts. So, the consortium was trying—as we're kind of transitioning with me coming on are observing who's already doing what piece of it and what's missing. How do we contribute to that piece? So, I mean, there's—you know, there's the Equal Pay Coalition working on equal pay.

There's family paid leave—coalitions working on that piece of the act and so we're playing a more supportive role to say how do we support you. How do we be present with you but we'll have to figure out kind of what's missing from all the different coalitions that are forming from WESA and how do we then take that on.

So, part of what I hope the process can do when I bring them on later this year is to kind of figure out what is our role at WESA and then what is the education piece. I think what's really missing right now is we have passed the bill but accountability and execution is where it's lacking and so how do we determine what needs to happen for accountability to take place. So, as kind of our role as well, too, is looking at accountability and execution so that we can support the coalitions that are doing specific work to advance their work.

RS: I want to go back to the—that story you told about the women holding up the pictures for—on Facebook. It's a pretty powerful image and powerful story and you've mentioned several Hmong women's organizations and I'm curious to hear more about what feminism, I guess, is looking like among young Hmong women and older, too, and how you see that developing, unfolding. Is feminism something that is kind of widely embraced by young Hmong women or is it not? What do you see as the—?

KY: Well, you know, the Hmong community in Minnesota is very diverse, as I'm learning. We have—because there were a few waves of migration for the Hmong community. The first wave was 1975 to 1980 and so that wave is right now—is me. We're like the one or the second generation. There was a wave in the late '90s and early 2000s and then there was a final wave in like 2005, 2006. So, there are a lot of differences in terms of world views, economics, politics in the different waves. But, we

have a lot of second migrations, too, so we have a lot of folks from California or from North Carolina who bring that experience as well, too. Then, we have folks who are financially very well-off but a very high population of poverty and so depending on kind of where they are and what their priorities are, it's hard to say by—I guess I can look at that question from—so there's a Hmong women's leadership institute, which is put on by another Hmong women's organization called "Hmong Women Achieving Together," and we are the seventh cohort and so I was a member in the first cohort. I facilitated then the remainder of them except for two in the middle so look at the different cohorts and kind of how they reacted to feminism and how they're approaching feminism. The first cohort was the cohort that I was in, was mostly kind of—I would say mid-career Hmong women where we've been through kind of the in-laws, you know, being married, having in-laws, having—taking cultural traditions but also the main career women, as well, too, and then being moms and how do we then talk to our children about gender norms in the Hmong community. So, I think we approach it from much more of like a—not so much feminism but just kind of equality and we need our girls and boys to be equally achieving education and career. We as career women need to be out. You know, you need to have the support system to be successful so we can support our families and that kind of thing. So, it's more kind of just equality.

The second cohort was a younger population. It was—the cohort was probably maybe—we sent college graduates and quite a few with graduate level degrees, so they came from a much more academic perspective and were looking at in terms of issues that really—so they looked at, you know, at data. How does—what is the data on community outcomes? You look at it from—again, it's from men to women. Why is it like that?

How do we change that and what is our goal to change that? So, for example, I think that was 1990—maybe 2000 was that cohort. So, they were looking at old census data from 1990 and management data; you know, how many women are in management positions and that kind of thing. So, what is it? How do we change these numbers? How do we get more women into management, more women into these positions? So, it was more kind of data and academic-driven.

The third cohort was much more activist-based. We had several activist artists in the cohort; you know, I would say, again, a recent college grad population but a more activist, more active population. So, they really looked at social movements in terms of how to we organize, how do we use culture and art as a way to shape equity and equality and how do we organize and how do we—and so there were several things. That was probably 2000 to 2002. If you just go out in the community to affect, I remember a couple things that they were able to get involved in. It might have been when they had some—when there were some racial remarks made by a local radio station that they were organizing around. The third—they were much more aware of what's happening in the community and then the fourth and fifth cohort I wasn't a part of.

The sixth cohort, which was in 2014, was a late twenties, early thirties age group but very aware of social injustice and social movements and so we actually talked more about feminism. We used the word much more comfortably among the cohort and with saying we're sick and tired, you know, as adults now to be treated and to be told how we should behave, how we should act, what we should be doing. The women in that group were, besides one of them, had never been married and so we had—so it was very—song in the Hmong community, if you're past eighteen or twenty and you're not married,

you're considered an old maid and what's wrong with you and nobody's going to marry you. So, of course, these women encounter this a lot, saying why aren't you married. Who—what—your career isn't going to take care of you. You need a husband to take—so they were just listening to that message over and over again. They were ready to say, “You know what? I'm OK with being single. I'm OK with not being married. I have a partner and we might choose to live together but we're not married and that's OK,” or, you know—and that was just—so it was much more—they were much more aware of just—not just the gender-based issues but issues around LGBTQ and just around the environment, issues around all these that was affecting them and their careers. So, they were much more aware of social movements in general but also through the lens of women as well, too, and so we did cover—because they were much more comfortable using terms like feminism and sexism and talked about it openly in that group and were comfortable talking about it in committee settings.

This final cohort this year is very comfortable with talking about feminism and understanding that things have to change and that they're not—and that they have—that they're the agents of change and they're—they declare themselves feminists. I said, “You know, it's up to you how you want to—I don't know if you're working in this field or in this movement but many of them are uncomfortable just saying I'm a feminist,” and I would say I think with that it does—I do see much more and part of it is, you know, social media has really opened my eyes to what's happening in the community, too, and kind of who's in my network and, of course, it depends who's in my network as well, too, on Facebook. But, I do see a lot more women that maybe might not have been expressing their passion about women's issues but expression it through Facebook and

through social media to really say this is important that women get paid less than men or that we have—so this year, we had a couple domestic violence situations where women were killed and just seeing the perspective of “Well, she treated, so that’s OK,” and then just the response saying there’s no reason for someone to be killed. Who cares if she was cheating? There was probably abuse or something leading up. There is so much more so just to kind of see the debates happening on these issues and seeing many, many more people speak up about it and just saying this can’t be happening. This is why. I think there have been several key leaders over the last few years who’ve been very vocal about feminism and gender equity that I think it’s—I think folks now have language to talk about it, to express how they feel about it, and I do see as there’s language around it, as there are these spaces for perspectives to come out and to share our opinions, I do see that there’s much more comfort with feminism. But, I think I still see much more work being called “gender equity” and looking at it and really saying because it’s unequal, it’s unequal pay between men and women. But, I still see the work for gender equity being used more than feminist work.

RS: You portrayed social media as a place where people were able to express this belief in feminism. Do you think it’s also a place where people are learning some of that language, reading about feminism in other contexts or whatever? You know, I’m sort of interested in the role that social media plays as both a place for expression and a place—like I think Erin called it, you know, “consciousness raising.” It happens on the internet now. Does that—do you think people are mostly expressing what they are—their own analysis of their lived experience or do you think they’re also sort of saying, “Oh, I saw this article about feminism over here and that looks like what I’m seeing over there.”

KY: I certainly think that that's happening as well, too. You know, part of the challenge that I experienced working with Hmong women early on as a volunteer and learning about this eventually is that Hmong girls and Hmong women traditionally are not encouraged to network outside their family clan systems, I think, because of cultural politics. It was always just kind of believed like if they're not part of your clan, they might sabotage you and so especially for married women it's very looked down upon for them to be affiliating themselves with non-family members and so they become very isolated and they become very absorbed in what the family beliefs are. So—and this includes young women, too. There are a lot of women in the cohorts who talk about lack of mentors because they don't have access to women outside their family systems and so I think the isolation—having access to social media really gives them access to articles, to perspectives that they otherwise wouldn't have access to, and if they're not in a women's studies program, then they don't really have access to kind of the narratives around feminism and issues affecting women.

So, I do see on my feet a lot of women sharing articles about feminism, about women's issues. They'll say, wow, this is what I was feeling. This is what I was thinking. This is what I was doing all along and now I have language so now I can talk about it this way. So, I do think social media and what people expose themselves to certainly gives them language but also some structure to their thinking about how they feel about what's happening around gender equity in the Hmong community and in general; I mean, even articles around workplace, the lack of women even in the workplace. It does give—and it gives data to women who don't usually get access to it, that are out looking for it than to have it come across a news feed—oh, this is



interesting—and they use it in their work. So, I think social media does give them a lot of access to data, to perspectives that they otherwise wouldn't have access to.

RS: Minnesota was way out front in the gay marriage movement and watching it from down in North Carolina, you know, it was kind of amazing. What is the—are our LGBTQ issues something that is also shaping the way you look at women's leadership and what is the—is there a connection in Minnesota between kind of feminists organizing, women organizing, and the gay marriage organizing? Is that a coalition or—?

KY: You know, there hasn't been any that I've been aware of but I know that was something that came up and this still comes up with the consortium as well, too, and, you know, what I say about it is that if somebody is experiencing inequality based on their identity, gender or identity, if they're going to oppress a woman and they're experiencing any kind of inequity because of the identity, then it's an issue that the consortium is concerned about and so—because ultimately what we're going against is the system of patriarchy, and if they feel oppressed because of that system due to their identity, then that's an issue that we will be concerned about. So, we haven't done any active partnering with LGBTQ organizations. I know of them. I know that they're doing—what work they're doing and on my part, we haven't really defined as an organization our priorities yet. You know, you might have heard this from Aaron as well, too, but we've just been really doing some—a lot of internal restructuring, rebuilding. Thirty-six years ago, things were—it's a different environment now. It's a different environment now and so figuring out what's a new environment, how do we maintain and sustain ourselves going ahead? So, once we prioritize, you know, kind of what we're

going to focus on, then we can do more strategic collaborations. But, when it comes to working with LGBTQ communities, I said to the board that my position is that if they identify as women and they experience oppression from a system of patriarchy, then it's a concern that we're going to look into.

RS: So, that would be particularly relevant with, let's say, trans-women, which I know for a lot of—you're in the Minnesota Women's Building and I know there's like—women's colleges are having to try to figure these things out.

KY: It's a controversial issue right now but I—we're not in the business of defining what womanhood is. You know, we identify being a woman and if we experience inequality because of that identity, then that's what the consortium should be concerned about.

RS: That's great. I'm trying to think. Well, just what are your sort of hopes for feminist activists, either here in Minnesota or more broadly? Are you feeling more optimistic, pessimistic and what are your kind of hopes?

KY: You know, I'm an optimist so I do think that there is a big future ahead but I'm also very practical and so I see that it's not going to be an easy road ahead. I think my biggest hope is that we can really move forward in solidarity across racial and ethnic lines, across socioeconomic class, and I do see a divide now between white feminism and women of color feminism and even within women of color, just all the different perspectives under that. I know for our most recent Economic Security Summit, we really wanted to make it much more inclusive and have voices from the community. Part of the reason why we did the community RFP process was we had a few racial groups and culture groups saying we're tired of being compared to white women or

coming in and saying—being reminded of how our lives are. Can we just have a space where we just come in and just say here's who we are and not say here's who we are compared to white women? So—and then within those different—the women of color category, the different racial and ethnic groups and how they're affected differently because of their immigration status or their class status. So, my hope is that we can find a way to really say, yes, we have all different perspectives and different experiences and we're affected differently by the paths that are there but how do we learn about that, about each other. How do we look for ways to support each other and how do we lift everybody up together? So, that's my hope is that we can move forward with this movement in solidarity and I know it's not going to be easy. It's not going to happen overnight but we begin that. So, part of what I hope to do in the next few months is to clear this space for organizations that serve women of color, so the women of color can come together and just share what do you see that's happening in your community and the groups that you serve. What do the economics look like? What's education look like? What does violence look like? How can we learn about what's happening? How do we share resources? How do we support each other and then how do we then come together and say here are one or two policies that could really benefit all of us? So, we'll try to kind of get that going. There have been a few women of color who have said we're willing to come and we want to learn. We want to help each other. So, that's my biggest hope right now is that we can create a more unified movement for women and, of course, women in Greater Minnesota as well, too.

RS: I'm realizing and this may be outside the scope of our interview but I'm realizing one of the things that my research is lacking right now is interviews with more rural women. Does the consortium serve any rural women's organizations?

KY: Yeah, we've got several member organizations from Greater Minnesota, not a whole lot, and so one of my priorities as well, too, is to get out to our Greater Minnesota communities and really say, you know, what—so far, for that Women's Economic Security Summit, one panel is from Mankato and they talked about the financial ramifications from intimate partner violence and so they were saying if you're in an abusive relationship and you rely on your intimate partner for transportation and if he takes that away and you work forty minutes away, there's no public transportation. You can't afford a cab and so just really being mindful that issues look different in different communities in much of Greater Minnesota. So, we've got a few members in Duluth, a few members in Mankato, a few in Rochester. But, I do want to get out to some of these communities and really say, you know, what's happening. So, I want to learn and just build some relationships and then, too, in the future, hope to be more inclusive when looking at policy and inclusive of women in Greater Minnesota as well, too. But, we do—we are a ( ) organization so we want to be doing more out there.

RS: Is there anything that I didn't ask you about that you would like to talk about or—?

KY: We've gone through quite a bit of stuff so, no, but, you know, it's helpful to do this because it makes me realize what I don't know. I'm like, wow, there's so much more I need to think about. There's so much more to do and so I appreciate going

through this process. But, I think I've pretty much shared as much as I can with you in a couple of hours.

RS: Thank you very much.

KY: Thank you.

END OF RECORDING