Precilla Yee Lan Choi, Ph.D. (1962–2005)

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For several weeks now, I've struggled with how and what to write. How does one capture the brilliance and passion, daring and dynamism of Precilla Choi, whose life ended all too soon May 10, 2005, in Melbourne, Australia? I'm not sure words can express such an essence. So here I sit with my memories, laughing through the tears, thinking Precilla would tell me “just get on with it.” So what follows is part biography, part memoir, combining Precilla's contributions to feminist health and exercise psychology with my recollections as well as those of a number of her friends and colleagues.

The last time I saw Precilla, we were in Vancouver where we spent most of one day walking throughout Stanley Park. Our roving encounters seemed to be a tradition when I met up with Precilla; we would take a day-long hike and brainstorm about our next collaborations. As anyone who’s ever worked with Precilla will appreciate, she came up with ideas not for a single study, but for what could have become a lifelong line of research! Although the ideas were plentiful, we did not decide upon a specific research plan, but knew that we would come up with our next step together in the near future. Shortly thereafter, I was asked to write a book chapter and thought maybe this would be a good opportunity for collaboration with Precilla. During an email conversation, I proposed that we write the chapter together. I received a classic Precilla response: “I just don’t find that very interesting to write about...” She countered with an offer to join her on a grant proposal. I agreed to collaborate, not because I was hugely interested in the topic of the study, but because I loved collaborating with Precilla. Even though the grant was not funded, I am grateful to have had that last opportunity to work with, learn from, be pushed by, and enjoy our short-lived research alliance.

It is particularly fitting that I am able to write about Precilla for WSPA; everything she did epitomized the goals of the journal. A feminist scholar, her research in exercise psychology focused on femininity, masculinity, and women's pursuit of fitness. Her book, Femininity and the Physically Active Woman (2000) is widely cited in our literature. In addition to her study of women in sport and exercise, she was an ardent activist for

* With contributions from Mark Andersen, Shannon Baird, Stuart Biddle, Celia Brackenridge, Nanette Mutrie, Kate Russell, Andy Smith, and David Tod

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all issues of social justice, Precilla passionately and boldly confronted sexism, spoke out against injustice to women in the field of sport and exercise science, and readily took on those she felt were biased or took advantage of their privileged positions. Most importantly, she encouraged everyone around her to recognize inequality and consider how they could create a more just world.

As Susan Bruce, Deputy President at Keele University expressed,

> During her time at Keele, Precilla worked tirelessly, and very hard, not only for the Local Association of Keele A.U.T., but also more generally in the University’s politics, confronting, when she met them, issues of sexism and racism with unfailing courage and bravery. Precilla was, in fact, one of the bravest and most courageous people I have ever had the (very great) pleasure of knowing, and—for much too short a time—of working with. She was sure in her opinions, sometimes outspoken in expressing them; but always, and unfailingly, supportive to those who sought her help in fighting injustice, be that injustice something that affected many people, or only one. She was very special, and every local community that was, or might have been, enriched with her presence, is impoverished by her death (Bruce, 2005).

Precilla’s Professional Path

Precilla’s first teaching position was at the University of Nottingham where she was a Lecturer in Health Psychology in the Department of Psychology (1992–1996). She then moved and became a Reader in Health Psychology in the Department of Psychology at Keele University in England (1996–2001). During 2001, she was the Deputy Head of the Department of Psychology at Keele. From Keele, Precilla moved to Loughborough University where she was a Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology in the Department of Social Sciences (2001–2002). Within a year of moving to Loughborough, the opportunity to fulfill her dream of moving to Australia arose and Precilla moved to Melbourne, Australia in 2002. There, Precilla was an associate professor in the Research Centre for Ageing, Rehabilitation, Exercise and Sport, within the School of Human Movement, Recreation & Performance at Victoria University, Australia (2002–2005). Almost immediately upon arriving in Australia, Precilla’s influence was felt as she took on the roles of School Research Coordinator and Chair of the School Research Committee. Mark Andersen described her presence at Victoria as:

> It may be a cliché, but “breath of fresh air” captures the initial, and continued, impact Precilla had on our School. She was always a dynamo of energy and spoke her mind equally (and eloquently) when she came across excellence as well as silliness. Her keen wit, no-nonsense attitude, ability to get to the heart of the matter, and her uncompromising demands for high ethical standards in research and supervision made her a model of what many of us in the School aspire to become as teachers and researchers.

Contributions to Feminist Scholarship

Precilla’s research was focused in the areas of health and exercise psychology. Her most recent research explored motherhood and maternity; masculinity and men’s bodies; and femininity, masculinity, and women’s body perceptions. Early in her career Precilla studied the psychological correlates of steroid abuse and the menstrual cycle and physical activity. Immediately, the brilliance of her

1. A footnote in Precilla’s vitae stated: The UK post of Reader has no obvious parallel in North America or Australia. It is a personal title awarded for research excellence by process of international peer review. Fewer than 10% of British Academics in the ‘old’ universities are promoted to this level or above (Association of University Teachers statistics for 1998).