

# Globe-trotting Priscilla Lee helps clients rewrite their inner stories

## TRANSCRIPT

Priscilla Lee, Registered Psychologist and Owner, Innerlogue Therapy & Psychology Calgary

### **Priscilla Lee** 00:06

"You know my job is to put myself out of a job, when you don't need me anymore. That means you have learned all the skills and strategies and you have found all the strength and resources within yourself to do really well in your life, and that you don't really need my support anymore."

### **Andy McLean** 00:24

Hello and welcome to Moments In Mind, a podcast from Pearson clinical assessment.

My name is Andy McLean. I'm a podcast producer based in Australia, and in this series, we share extraordinary stories of professionals who make a difference in people's mental wellbeing every single day.

In each episode, a special guest reveals moments that have changed not only their life—but also the lives of the people who they support. In today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with Priscilla Lee, a psychologist who runs her own practice called Innerlogue Therapy, in a career that started in Singapore and now continues in Calgary, Canada. Priscilla has helped people with a variety of conditions, including ADHD, dyslexia, anxiety, work-related stress, burnout and many more. Priscilla has also worked a lot with children, families and women to achieve their potential, including, but not limited to, twice-exceptional gifted learners. What really came across for me in our discussion was Priscilla's warmth, her caring and sincere approach. She reminds us that when it comes to mental health, we all have low moments, but we don't have to stay down forever. We can pick ourselves up when we give ourselves grace and self-compassion, when we know effective coping strategies. This one is a lovely conversation, and I can't wait to share it with you. So let's jump in and take a listen.

### **Andy McLean**

Priscilla, welcome to Moments in Mind.

### **Priscilla Lee** 01:50

Hi Andy, thanks for having me.

### **Andy McLean** 01:53

Well, I'm thrilled to have you on the show. We've got so much to cover, but before we get into your professional life, I'd like to go right back in time to your earliest childhood memory. Can you tell me what that was?

### **Priscilla Lee** 02:06

Yeah, one memory that really stuck in my mind was when I was in grade two, primary two, studying in Singapore.

I remember that at that time, I didn't know, but I was placed in a high-abilities class at a really good school. And the teachers actually asked a question to the class that I was in, and they asked, "I've heard that some of the kids here are doing assessment books and materials that are beyond what is for primary two so can I have a show of hands, how many of you are doing primary three materials"? And then half of the class actually raised their hands, and then the teachers asked again, the teacher was like, "Oh, okay, well, how many of you are doing primary four?" And again, like a bunch of people put up their hands, "Primary five?", and then there was still a few more hands and, "Primary six?" and there was still, like, one or two people who were putting up their hands. And I was just in shock, because I did not put my hand up.

**Andy McLean**

So your hand didn't go up for any of those stages. Is that, right?

**Priscilla Lee**

No, I didn't know at primary two, like, am I supposed to be doing assessment books for primary?

**Andy McLean 03:37**

Wow. And, you know, you were a high achiever, and yet, you found yourself in a peer group of, high achievers and even higher achievers. Did you feel pressure at that point as a kid? Like that early on? Do you think?

**Priscilla Lee 03:50**

I think, as a kid at that time, I didn't really quite understand the context. It's only hindsight that I realised the class that I was placed in were people who were doing really advanced stuff. And a lot of my classmates then actually, you know, went into, like, the gifted stream, like, into like, top schools, right? But in that context, as an eight year old, I thought, "Well, I must be really dumb!"

**Andy McLean 04:22**

Well, I've read your CV, and you and I have spoken before, Priscilla, so I know that that's not the case. And there's evidence littered all the way through and we'll discuss some of that today. Let's talk perhaps, about your early career. I'm interested in what made you choose a career in psychology?

**Priscilla Lee 04:37**

My first course of study was actually in computers. So I'm really interested in all things computers, but I quickly realised that it was just a passion, a hobby that I like doing on the side, and I didn't really want to pursue a career in computers. So I asked myself, "Okay, what is something that I really, really enjoy and are really curious about"? Because it has to be something that is going to sustain my curiosity and my interest to learn about that for many, many years. So I picked psychology and philosophy.

**Andy McLean 05:14**

Wow. So you weren't just studying how people think, you were actually going right to the heart of some of the biggest questions that humanity has asked, not just today, but through all of time, right?

**Priscilla Lee** 05:25

I think philosophy was a really interesting area of studies, from what I've heard from other psychologists, and we're talking about psychology as you know, in its infancy, like 50, 100 years ago that people study psychology alongside philosophy, really commonly. Because it's asking about the why, right? Like, what makes us human? Why are we here? And those questions.

**Andy McLean** 05:53

Absolutely. That's fascinating. Now, can you tell me a little bit about your approach to psychology? You can take psychology in so many different directions can't you? Professionally? And so people specialise in different areas. Tell me a bit about your work and why that's been so transformational for some of your clients?

**Priscilla Lee** 06:11

Right now I'm really passionate about helping adults who are facing burnout in the workplace, especially adults in the mental health and healthcare setting, because it is really stressful, and we face high burnout levels as well. I'm very passionate working with people who are neurodiverse. So for example, people on the autism spectrum and have ADHD.

**Andy McLean** 06:44

Of course, yeah, and you talked earlier about the fact that you were a high achiever at school, and I believe you also work with twice exceptional, gifted learners today. Is that correct?

**Priscilla Lee** 06:57

So I work with both children and adults twice exceptional learners. So how we define twice exceptional would be people who have been tested to be gifted and they also have a learning disability. So it could be dyslexia, some of them with ADHD or are on the autism spectrum.

**Andy McLean** 07:23

That's fascinating, isn't it? Because sometimes in a classroom setting, certain behaviours could be interpreted or misinterpreted, I guess, as either non-engagement on the part of the child, a lack of motivation, or being easily distracted. Some of those types of symptoms can actually lead teachers and indeed students down the wrong path in terms of their understanding of themselves and their potential. What you're doing is helping to identify issues that people are having, and then also being able to help them to sort of build on their strengths as well.

**Priscilla Lee** 07:56

So you know, when we work with twice exceptional we don't just see people as okay, you have the gifted side of you, and you have the ADHD side of you, right? Because your brain just doesn't split into half equally that way. So we actually have to work with the whole person. And

this is not just about their abilities, because we know, with a lot of gifted learners, they are pretty smart, and it's easy for them to grasp a lot of concepts. In fact, so much so that a lot of twice exceptional people, might actually fall under the radar, for ADHD or dyslexia, because their gifted minds actually overcompensate like compensates for it and hides all those symptoms. So people might not even notice that, and only when they're a little bit older and they're able to express themselves in that way and try to discover what's going on with their mind that is so unique, then they discover all these things about themselves. And to make sense of that and to like, celebrate, you know, the brilliance of their mind, as well as to embrace the parts that they need more support and maybe strategies and coping skills to help them to make sure that, different areas of their lives are well supported and not hindered because of their differences in their brain and the way their brain works.

**Andy McLean 09:29**

With such a varied career you must have witnessed some extraordinary moments with clients down the years? Can you perhaps give me an example where you've made a difference in someone's life?

**Priscilla Lee 09:40**

I remember a client that I worked with in Singapore, and I believe he was about 10 or 11 years old at that time, and he was diagnosed with dyspraxia. So dyspraxia is really interesting. It falls in between the area of what psychologists would work with under learning disabilities, but it's also about movement. So they kind of overlap with occupational therapists and dyspraxia. People with dyspraxia, they struggle with handwriting, organisational skills, tying shoelaces Right? So from the outside, they're like, really abstract things, but actually they all are built from certain types of like organisational skills that are really important. And so in that setting, I was working more as an educational psychologist helping children and teenagers with the struggles that they might face in school. And for this kid, he was failing math really, really poorly. What I could help him with was actually firstly, sparking that interest in learning about math. So using different math puzzles, like Sudoku, for example. I like to use this one called KenKen, that one is really fun, and make math really interesting. And then next was to teach him some of the skills that are going to help him understand his brain a little bit better understand, how can he organise his work a little bit better, like handwriting and things like that. In some ways you could joke that it's kind of like a glorified tuition teacher. But, you know, because we actually study how the brain works and how all these small pieces of the puzzle are going to help this person succeed, this is not about someone with poor math ability. This is someone with poor organisational skills, so once we worked on some of those skills, and by the end of that year, he was in the top five in his class for math, and he was so proud, and his parents were so proud of him. So it's not really about working on the math itself, but even working on these skills and understanding the way our brain works, and making sure we have strategies to help us understand how to not let these area be hurdles for us but to have good achievements.

**Andy McLean 12:25**

Incredible. So tell me what that's like for you as a therapist, when you have those moments with young people and they're having those breakthroughs?

**Priscilla Lee** 12:33

So it's really important for young people in that setting, I worked with a lot of people with dyslexia or dyspraxia and things like that. And sometimes the achievement piece, it is important for a child's development of their social emotional area, because they want to feel good and they want to feel like they're able to succeed, whatever the context is, So it's not about scoring, like, really high scores, but just meeting or meeting their potential. I think it was important for them, because they knew they could do it with a little bit of support and mental health. We say the same thing, right? People have ups and downs, and we have moments where, you know, when we're in a low period, when we're low, it doesn't mean that we have to stay down like forever, right? It just means that, we're allowed to give ourselves grace and kindness to ourselves and learn the skills and coping strategies to pick ourselves up. And I see it the same.

**Andy McLean** 13:44

Yeah, it's so important, isn't it, and it can be really powerful. Giving yourself that self-compassion and that grace that you've just described can just let you to kind of regulate your body a little bit and your brain, and then, you know, act from a place of calm rather than a place of high stress.

**Priscilla Lee** 13:59

Oh, for sure. And that's what I like to tell my clients, I joke about it that way, but you know my job is to put myself out of a job like when you don't need me anymore. That means you have learned all the skills and strategies, and you have found all the strength and resources within yourself to do really well in your life, and that you don't really need my support anymore. That's when I know I did a good job.

**Andy McLean** 14:29

Oh, that's beautiful. I love that. That brings us to the end of part one of our conversation. Let's take a pause and we'll be right back after this short break.

**Promotional break** 14:42

For more than 100 years, Pearson clinical assessment has tested and refined products and services that give educators and clinicians trusted tools to make a profound difference in the lives of adults and children. Check out the Pearson Website to find out about the tools that Priscilla's colleagues at analog therapy use, including the Wechsler family of assessments and Q global, which is the web based system for administering, scoring and reporting assessments wherever you are in the world, just Google Pearson clinical assessment.

**Andy McLean** 15:23

Welcome back to the podcast. So far, we've talked mostly about Singapore and your life in Singapore, but right now, you're speaking to us from Calgary in Canada. So I'm just wondering, was there a sliding doors moment that took you from Singapore to Canada, and what did that involve?

**Priscilla Lee** 15:46

So that was about seven years ago. It was a really big moment, I guess, to make that decision to move because it is scary. I didn't have a job lined up for me or anything like that. I applied for the permanent resident visa, and I just knew that I needed a change of environment, that it was going to be an adventure. Singapore is lovely. I love Singapore, but it is a small country. To put into context, Singapore, like the location, the geographical size of Singapore is about the same as Calgary city. It's not exactly the same, but it's about there. It takes you, like, 40 minutes to drive from one end to the other end of the city. And in Singapore, we have, what, five, six million people?. And in Calgary we only have, we have less than 2 million people, so it's a very different kind of lifestyle and pace. And I was looking for an adventure. So off I went. And seven years ago, back then, psychology was not a regulated profession in Singapore, and it was only later that the government started making some changes to that. So at that time, it was, it was fun, like trying to start over as a psychologist in a new country and that was really exciting for me.

**Andy McLean**

And what was it about Canada? Because obviously, you were in Singapore, and hypothetically, with a pretty portable profession like yours, you could take that anywhere in the world. So why Canada?

**Priscilla Lee**

I definitely considered Australia...

**Andy McLean**

I'm very glad to hear it.

**Priscilla Lee 17:36**

Yeah, I did my undergraduate in Australia and Melbourne, actually. So I really have fond memories of Australia as well. But I was really drawn to Canada for its outdoors and in Calgary, we are just an hour's drive to the Rockies, so there's lots to explore in this beautiful country, and the people here are lovely. So I really didn't feel like there were a lot of hurdles, like since I moved here, like everybody had been so, friendly and nice and so, Canada was a good choice at that time. Like, amongst the available options, Canada was a was a good option.

**Andy McLean 18:23**

So I believe Priscilla that before you got on that plane, you'd never been to Calgary? You'd been to Canada before, but you'd never been to Calgary. Can you describe what your feelings were as you sat on the tarmac in Singapore preparing to go and live in your new home? What was that like?

**Priscilla Lee 18:39**

To be honest, while I had a lot of hopes and dreams of how my new life was going to be, I had a lot of backup plans as well. I had joked with some of my friends that maybe I might find some odd jobs, and, you know, and see how it goes. You know the stereotype? with new immigrants in a new country and, yeah, and the situation with, underemployment and things like that, and that was a reality for me, but to me, I thought it was important to keep a positive mindset, you

know, and just embrace this as a journey, right?

So it's what people say. It's not about the destination, it's about the journey as well. And if we learn to enjoy the journey, then it will be a win either way. And we had planned for six months like, if in six months we couldn't get a job, and, you know, settle down here, we'll just take it as a six month sabbatical holiday and then move back to Singapore. So yeah, that was the plan.

**Andy McLean** 19:50

So you've been in Calgary now for seven years, during which time you've set up your own business, Innerlogue Therapy. Tell me a little bit about the decision-making process and why you set up your own clinic?

**Priscilla Lee** 20:03

So I have spent many years working in the nonprofit sector, both in Singapore and in Canada, and after having my kid, he's three and a half years old now, and also going through, like various medical issues and struggles. I decided that, you know what, the only way I can be not tied down to a fixed hours job is to start my own private practice. And so I just went for it. I just rented an office, so a one-room office, and set up shop.

**Andy McLean** 20:47

And here we are, three years later, and you've grown since then, haven't you?

**Priscilla Lee** 20:52

So the first year I was a solo practitioner, in that sense, I was a one person show. And then the second year, I rented a larger office, and I started hiring other psychologists, and this is my third year in private practice.

**Andy McLean**

So it's really exciting for other psychologists who are listening right now, who might be toying with the idea of setting up their own clinic. Would you have any advice or reflections for them?

**Priscilla Lee** 21:24

So I feel really passionate about supervising newer psychologists. I do that a lot as a clinical supervisor in my previous jobs as well.

Currently, I am supervising some students, and my tip for them is, you know, to make sure that you're ready and learn as much as you can before jumping into private practice, because this is a whole different ball game altogether. At the same time, you don't have to wait, like me - 15 years before starting a private practice, because I had a change in, like, a different country, moving to a different place, But if you're in practice for like five years, even it's a good amount of time, and you have learned a lot, and a lot of the things that you have learned would be transferable skills.

When I was working in nonprofits I did hiring as a manager, I did clinical supervision, I had to do some marketing. I was sent for some training and professional development, and all of these things I've learned so much, and they're all transferable to now as a private practice owner.

**Andy McLean** 22:39



So what you're saying is, don't underestimate yourself, if you've got about five years experience working in a practice, then you probably know more than you realise. And perhaps if you if you're considering it, then maybe back yourself and give it a go.

**Priscilla Lee** 22:55

Oh yeah, for sure. And I think that the scene in psychology now is very different than 10 years ago. A lot more people, especially during the COVID period, a lot of people are really realising the value that psychologists bring to their lives, and seeking out for psychologists whom they can identify with, who they feel they're able to help them. So a lot more people are seeking out for psychology help right now. So if you study the market and you feel like, hey, there's a demand in your area, and you know you have the skills and have been working for a few years. Like, go, give it a shot. Don't be scared. You never know?

**Andy McLean** 23:40

So Priscilla, I know that standardised assessments are an important part of Innerlogue Therapy. Could you just tell me a little bit about the role that they play in your clinic?

**Priscilla Lee** 23:51

At Innerlogue Therapy and Psychology, we have psychologists that specialise in different areas, so we have a couple of psychologists who specialise in assessments, and we do assessments for a full psycho educational assessment, and usually that would include the Wechsler, the WISC for children, and we also do assessments for ADHD for autism and different areas.

So we do a lot of assessments, and they're really important because they give us information about our clients. Very typically, someone would do an assessment, and we would give them recommendation of what kind of support or resources there are, and with that, it's a lot easier for their therapists, whoever that they're working with or could be working with in future, like once they see those areas that need extra support that really gives us information about what to work with and what to focus with the child.

**Andy McLean** 25:00

Yeah. And because obviously you're in the therapist chair, Priscilla, you can take those results, and then you can tailor your intervention and your program of work with a particular client?

**Priscilla Lee** 25:10

Of course! So, for example, for the WISC, we do see the profile, and there might be certain profiles that would indicate potential, like further diagnosis, like they might suss-out, like ADHD and things like that, and then that would call for other kinds of assessments to be done for the child, so that we make sure that the child is getting the full picture of what's going on with the child right now and get a better idea of how we can support them.

So it's not only about like getting an IQ score, but really a lot of parents are sending their child for assessments for various concerns. It could be behavioural, it could be emotional concerns for their child, and so these assessments actually give us some good information.

**Andy McLean** 26:04



You've mentioned parents there. I'm interested. As a therapist, you have perhaps an hour long session with a child, and then the child goes out into the wider world, and they're at school and they're at home with their family and with teachers and so on. How, as a therapist, can you help to inform the other people in a child's life so that when they're outside of the clinic, they can follow a program of work and collectively support the child to achieve a positive outcome?

**Priscilla Lee** 26:31

That's a very good question, because there are a few components here, other than working with a child.

So firstly, with the assessment piece, the assessment always comes with a recommendation. So with the assessment or any kind of diagnosis and the recommendations, we can then submit these recommendations to their school to get extra support from teachers and school management to see how we can better support the child?

And different kids have different needs. So next for the parents is to help them understand, what does this mean for them as parents and for their child? And for a lot of parents, they think that, oh, you know, like the psychologist work, just works for my kid once a week, right? That's it? But no actually, for myself, especially, I can't speak on behalf of all psychologists, but when I work with families, I always work with their parents, because we don't exist in a vacuum. You know, the child exists within a family, within a community with within a school system, within a larger context, right? And just that one hour of therapy alone is not enough to make change. I'll give you an example. Let's say if I'm working with a child on certain behaviour issues, and I teach them the skills, the strategies, and send them off to the world. What happens is that a few weeks later, they're going to come back and nothing has changed. Why? Because we're talking about a younger child here, especially because they don't have the tools to reinforce these good behaviours. We need the parents, the teachers. We need people around them to support them, to pick up on these good things that they're trying to change, and tell them, you're doing good job. Like give them immediate feedback, right? Like seeing your psychologist one week later and saying, "Oh yeah, one week ago, I did this one thing, like I practiced that skill once," and by the time they meet me too much time has passed, and we need to catch that moment when they're doing a good job with certain behaviours or a certain context, and we need to praise them, you know, "Good job like you've you've done so well, you're trying your best here, right?" And that actually helps them internalise that this good behaviour is making them feel good, and then they would want to continue to make changes to their lives.

**Andy McLean** 29:16

That's wonderful. It really is a joint effort, isn't it? And when you can get everybody engaged and on that journey with the child, then you can really set everyone up for success, especially the child. Now Priscilla, we've covered so much of your career today, but alas, we are running out of time. But before we go, let's look ahead. I'm interested in many years from now, when you're looking back on your career, what do you think will be some of the moments that you'll remember most?

**Priscilla Lee** 29:44

I think I'd be pretty proud of myself. This is, this is not an easy journey to become a psychologist, not easy in Singapore, and also not easy in Canada, like there are lots of hoops

to go through to become a psychologist. Yes, but it is such a rewarding job that I'm just so proud of myself that I made it this far and helped so many people.

**Andy McLean 30:09**

Well, your passion and your dedication to your career has certainly shown through in today's conversation. Priscilla, thank you so very much for your time.

**Priscilla Lee 30:18**

Thank you Andy.

**Andy McLean 28:24**

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