

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Bernice Lott

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Washington, DC
February 10, 2005*

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B: Bernice Lott, Interview participant

A: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

W: Wade Pickren, Interviewer

B: I was born in Brooklyn,...in the great state of Brooklyn.

A: Would you care to give the date of your birth?

B: Of course! I was born on - my birthday is coming up pretty soon - on the 31st of March in 1930 - a hell of a long time ago.

A: (laughs) Why don't we get started with the 1950s. I noticed from your C.V. that you must have transferred at some point to UCLA from...

B: (laughs) I got married. I was going to Brooklyn College - you have to take us back to the 40s because I started at Brooklyn College when I was 16, in 1946. I stayed at Brooklyn for three years and got married at age 19. I went with my husband, who was a psychology student at Brooklyn, to UCLA where he entered graduate school. I got there too late, so I worked in the world, in the rough world, for six months [doing billing for a Christmas tree "factory"]. I entered UCLA in the middle of the next year and just stayed on and got my PhD there .

A: You must have then identified psychology as your –

B: Oh absolutely. I identified psychology when I was an undergraduate at Brooklyn. I started out as a sociology major, and sociology I found much too filled with jargon and foolish and abstract and not really anything that I could sink my teeth into. I took my first psychology course in experimental psych and it was fantastic and I loved it.

A: Do you remember who taught that course?

B: I do. I do. David Raab, who I don't think is any longer with us. David Raab. Great course. And then as I took one psych class after another it became clear to me that what I needed to do was to use the methods of psychology to answer the questions that I thought would be answered in sociology but were not. These were social justice kinds of questions, social problems kinds of questions. So my questions stayed the same but with

the methods of psychology I thought – yes, this is a great bringing together of what I want to do. And so social psychology seemed the natural thing.

A: Where did your interests in social issues and social justice come from?

B: It came from the world in which I grew up

A: Do you want to just describe...

B: I grew up in Brooklyn in, let's see, there was a world war going on during my teenage years. During my late teenage years there were a lot of political issues. I was very politically active at Brooklyn College. Burning international as well as domestic issues were just there. (laughs)

A: What kind of issues did you kind of throw yourself into at that point? Political issues?

B: Civil rights, war and peace, domestic agenda issues - remember that the Rosenbergs were executed in the early '50s and there was the McCarthy period preceded by the House Committee on Un-American Activities - you're not from Canada are you? (A: Yes I am) oh, so you are. Well, we have the proud history of the House Un-American Activities Committee – HUAC - and browbeating and oh just you name it there was something to be done. Actually I remember a small group of us marching around Brooklyn College when a group I was a member of invited Howard Fast to speak and the Dean said “No, Howard Fast can't speak because he's a communist” - that was my first letter of reprimand in a personnel folder (laughs). So anyway, I left Brooklyn College, got married, and I went to UCLA.

A: From where did your personal politics come?

B: The world. From my background. As I said in my little three-minute talk in Hollywood last week or two weeks ago, I'm the daughter of Eastern European Jewish immigrants, so I'm part of a generation that didn't experience the immigrant experience. But my parents did, and that was part of my background, and my background is very working class. I lived in very working class communities in Brooklyn and this was just (A: part of your fiber?) part of my fiber. I had two older sisters who were active in a variety of things. They had gone to Brooklyn College before me. One of them left and then went over to the University of Chicago. It's hard to see where it all comes from except it certainly did not seem unnatural, definitely minority, but not that strongly minority in the communities and the streets and the schools and the classes and so on that I grew up in. Not that everybody turned out to be a radical, that is for sure not the case, but enough of us, I mean there were enough of us clinging to one another and there were enough issues and things to do.

A: Was Brooklyn College a place where you would say sort of radical -

B: Brooklyn College was a free City College then. I talk to people who teach in various

parts of the CUNY system now and it's a little different, and well, a little the same. But Brooklyn College when I started - first of all I started in 1946. The war was just over. Girls had to pass a test to get in (laughs) - but I don't know about the guys. Of course a lot of returning veterans were coming in. The G.I Bill was there. So there were a lot of returning veterans. A lot of energy from those guys, a lot of energy from the girls who had passed the test and made it. It was the beginning of the McCarthy era. A number of faculty were sort of under the gun beginning then. This was also true when I went to UCLA. This was all happening to faculty.

Okay, so it's hard to answer your question. The City Colleges were free, which is not the case anymore. All we had to do was pay for lab fees, or you know library and stuff. So there were a lot of working class kids coming in with high hopes and big dreams and certainly the City Colleges then were spawning grounds for later Nobel prize winners and I think the percentage of people who are known to have gone on for doctorates is extraordinarily high. Things have changed a little bit, but was it true that our faculty were all radical? No. Was it true that they were even all liberal? No. (laughs) But there was, there was certainly a lot of energy in classrooms and students did a lot of talking and there was a lot happening, so it was more of a student-driven free expression, which drove some teachers nuts. It really wasn't, it certainly wasn't administration-driven because I've told you about our Dean, and it wasn't so much faculty-driven either. It was students, and that particular time. I remember one of my sociology professors who was very angry with me and I remember he was handing back an "A" paper and saying things that people shouldn't be saying to their students - talking about how distasteful he found the idea of me and my people, or me and my group, or me and my political ideas - handing back an "A" paper and making this little speech in the classroom. Not a nice man. So that was faculty (laughs). But the students there, yeah it was great. Brooklyn College was wonderful.

A: And you said that originally your interest in social justice and social issues was already there and then (B: social problems) and social problems, but then you found sociology a little bit airy-fairy and so you redirected it towards psychology (B: absolutely the methods) social psychology in particular. So what was it about social psychology that attracted you?

B: Well, that I was able then to use empirical methods, which I had a great deal of respect for, because this would really give me answers to the questions that continued to interest me. You know, questions about the kinds of attitudes people have towards one another. Questions about prejudice. Questions about war and peace. Questions about, you know, those issues.

So that was great, that was fun. When I went to UCLA, I was able to take more and more classes. At Brooklyn I probably didn't have that many psych classes, but then of course I went to graduate school and was able to go from undergrad at UCLA right into a graduate program. I just was able to continue thinking and doing and...

A: and you got through pretty quickly it looks like from your CV - three years.

B: Yeah. I had my doctorate by the time I was 23.

A: Wow, can you tell (B: it was a different period of time) yeah, can you tell (B: who knows how I did it) yeah (laughs). Well, talk a little bit about your experience as a graduate student.

B: Well, I had some interesting experiences as a graduate student. The first day that I reported as a graduate student to UCLA (of course I had already been there as an undergrad, but this was my first day you know my first day as a legitimate grad student), I remember walking the halls and meeting Roy Dorcas - may he rest in peace somewhere. Roy Dorcas, who was both chair of the department and the Dean of the grad- no he wasn't Dean of the graduate school, no I don't think - I think he was Dean of what was called probably life sciences or natural science. I think it was called life sciences. I think psychology was in life sciences. Anyway, Roy Dorcas was also very famous in psychology in the research area of hypnotism. But anyway, I remember meeting him and shaking his hand. Somebody introduced me and he looked at me and he said, "Well," (I'm paraphrasing) "I'm happy to meet you, but I'm really sorry because I know that the time and effort that we put into your graduate studies will be a waste, because you're going to be out of here with your children in a few years." Now I've since learned from reading other stories, other narratives, that that was not an unusual greeting. But that was mine, on my first day.

A: And you were already married at that time right?

B: I was still married - my first marriage. Yeah yeah yeah, I was married. Which is why he said you know you were gonna have babies and be out of here

A: If you hadn't been married he would've said you were just gonna get married (B: Exactly, I was already married). So who did you work with at UCLA?

B: It's kind of interesting at UCLA - what happened to me. As a social psychologist I hooked up a little bit with Richard Centers who at that time was doing social class work. But even more I hooked up with Franklin Fearing. Probably that name doesn't mean anything to you. But Frank Fearing became my major professor, and he was a very interesting man because he had just recently given up pigeon work. He had been a physiological psychologist. He'd given up his pigeons. He was now into social psych and he was deeply deeply Lewinian, deeply Gestalt, deeply field theory, very interested in communication issues. So he was my major professor and at some point - I worked all the time when I was a graduate student, here, there, and everywhere - but at some point I became his research assistant. And he became my major professor. But at the same time I sort of - this was really wonderful because it was such a broad experience for me - at the same time I started taking classes with a guy who I absolutely adored and who is still at UCLA, although he's retired. Irving Maltzman - who had studied with Spence at Iowa. And I became a dedicated behaviorist. So I was, and still am, actually, a weird mold or mixture. I'm a Lewinian, behaviorist, social psychologist. And my work with Irv was just wonderful. I appreciated his respect for the philosophy of science. I appreciated

how he could explain creativity in a behaviorist way. These were very important influences on my work.

A: And how did the behaviorist position influence what you would do?

B: (laughs) Alright, well, I did my dissertation on the formation of attitudes using a learning model. It wasn't so much behaviorism that was important to me, - although that was the framework - as much as learning theory. So I used the mediated generalization paradigm to teach kindergarten children to prefer one color over another, and not only to prefer one color over another, but to generalize that preference into different kinds of situations. And I did it with a really kind of fun model game and reinforcements. But essentially what I was doing was saying this is the way in which people learn prejudice.

A: Okay, okay, so in the back of your mind (B: no it was right up front) uh it was right upfront

B: Oh no, it was right up front. But that's what I was doing - I was dealing with the acquisition of a negative attitude and a positive attitude at the same time. I was dealing with the acquisition of an attitude in a very primitive, well I wouldn't call it primitive, sort of a down-deep way with young children using a mediated generalization paradigm. No it was very clear, it was all upfront. I had - this name probably doesn't mean anything to you either - but at that time the work of Isidor Chein influenced me too because he also had been looking, within a behaviorist framework, at attitudes and I just took it to a different level. My dissertation later became sort of a classic. You can find it in a book on *Classics*. (laughs), only by people like Lew Lipsitt, who was also in that same kind of learning-theory-oriented [circle]. Do you know who Lew Lipsitt is?

A: Oh, Lew Lipsitt, of course. Lew is actually going to be at Cheiron, a conference. (B: oh good good good). Yeah, he's a good guy. So after the first comment from the director there about, well a waste of our time (B: oh Roy Dorcas), yeah, what was it like to be a woman in graduate school at UCLA?

B: It was not lonely, but most of the graduate students in psychology were guys, partially because, again, these were returning veterans. They were on the G.I. Bill. And partially it was the 50s. (laughs) They were mostly guys. There were maybe one, two, three, four, women graduate students the whole time I was there. Most of them were in clinical. Some of them I didn't know well. A couple of the women who were in graduate school with me later committed suicide. A lot of crazy things going on during that time. The women friends that I had were primarily the wives of the men in the graduate program. So I was married, most of the guys were married. They were a little bit older. They had been to, you know, they had been to the big war and they had wives who were either working and helping put them through school or they were having little babies. So I was different because I was going to school along with my husband who was also a veteran.

A: Was he also in psychology? (B: oh yeah yes) Right, okay. So when you finished at UCLA, you went on to Colorado first?

B: Not yet (A: okay) (laughs) it's a long story. Remember, I've had a long life. No, when I finished UCLA, my husband at the time had finished a little bit before me because when we went there he already had his bachelor's degree and I didn't. So he was done. He got a job at the brand new University of California campus in Riverside. So he got a job in Riverside and I guess he hung around UCLA for a while doing research. We went to Riverside together. He joined the faculty. I began my woman's career as a hustler. (laughs) Those were my hustling days. So for six months, the first six months that I was in Riverside, I started doing what a lot of women both then and now do. Because I had my PhD. I started teaching extension, whatever it was called, but you know what it is. You know, the part of the university that is somewhere else - not the regular program. I don't remember what they called it - extension I mean. So I started doing that and I taught whatever they gave me to teach and then I started looking for a job and I talked myself into a job in the public school system. California had just passed a law in which they were going to mainstream mentally retarded youngsters, and they were distinguishing between educable and trainable. Trainable, away; educable, into the schools. I talked myself into a job at the Riverside Junior High School. I already had my PhD. I was going to work with a group of educable, so-called mentally retarded adolescents. In order to get this job I had to get a secondary school credential, which I did. I took a correspondence course. I took a course on audio-visual techniques. (laughs) (A: this is a lot that you got yourself into, I would say) And I took a course on secondary - no I took a course on special populations. Right. So I took those courses, probably I did some during the course of the semester. Then I did some over the summer and I started in this junior high school. I also talked my principal into permitting me to do research. (laughs)

So there I started, and for the next two years I worked with a group of teenagers. This was one of the greatest experiences of my life. I'll never forget it. It was very very important to me because it taught me an enormous amount. I worked with a group of seventh, eighth and ninth-grade students. My class had to be entered from the back of the school and was in the basement. There were two classes in the basement of this junior high school. My class of the mentally, so-called mentally retarded kids, and another class of bad kids, bad boys. There were the two of us (teachers and classes) in the basement. We couldn't get in any other way.

Okay, what did I learn? I had, I think, twelve [students]. I learned that the diagnoses we give on the basis of our psychological tests are dreadful. Never trust them, because in my class of so-called mentally retarded kids there were, um I can't remember exactly, about two or three kids with severe hearing problems. There were three who were bad, and they could've been in the other class (laughs). They were bad and they also didn't do well on their tests. There were about three or four who spoke more Spanish than English and just were not communicating well in English. And then the others, you know they were slow but they certainly were not the way they had been presented to me. So it was a real big challenge, and it was very exciting. And what I did with this class was to bring them forward into the mainstream as best I could. For example, we insisted on doing a play just like every other homeroom class. We did a play each of my two years there. I don't remember what we did but we made up something, we did it. I also was able to do

research on comparing the mentally retarded kids with the so-called normal kids on a variety of learning capacities. Not academic, but other kinds of learning. And it was of course very interesting to see that in some ways there were a great many similarities, and in some places there were differences. That paper got published. So I was sort of interested for a while in the whole area of retardation. But then I left Riverside because I got a divorce. (laughs) And then I started a whole new life.

A: Okay, before we before we (B: before we leave Riverside yeah), what kinds of tests were being used at the time to classify people as mentally retarded?

B: Oh the standards, whatever. WISC, (A: yeah okay) probably not the Stanford Binet. Whatever it was that the state was using. Now in Riverside, before we leave Riverside, the reason this was going on and the reason there were Spanish speaking kids is because Riverside at that time, and still to some extent, is very agricultural, and there were lots of Mexican-American families who came in for the harvest. And those kids didn't go to school of course until harvest was over. Those schools were just you know, taking them in and treating them as dummies. So yeah, there was a lot of that. It was quite an experience. But working with those kids was really great. And the lessons you know are sort of indelible for me as a psychologist.

A: And so then you got a divorce and started again (B: yup) a new chapter. (B: yup) So what, in essence, what did the divorce sort of do for you, in terms of-

B: Well, I left California. Things in the '50s, this was late 50s, were different in psychology I think. I was able to get a job at the APA convention. I don't think it's that easy to do anymore. But I had contacts that I had built up as a graduate student when I used to go to conferences and meet, you know -oh, that's sort of another chapter. I don't know if you want to get into that. (laughs) But the important men that Wade has in his series, important men were sexist pigs. And women graduate students, you know, we'd get ogled. We'd get invited to parties. It was you know a really bad scene. So there were always parties. There was always, you know, meetings at the bars. I don't know about anything more extraordinary or substantive or physical, but there were always [stories], I knew so and so. I knew so and so. I knew so and so. But anyway I went (A: you were still fairly novice as a woman in -) I was a woman graduate student. (laughs) I don't know about novice. We weren't treated respectfully. But on the other hand, it was, you know, access. I could walk into some place and say hello to somebody really important.

Anyway, I went to the convention and actually through a really wonderful person at UCLA who was not an ogler but who had been one of my faculty, a learning animal guy by the name of Gilhausen, I was introduced to Skinner and offered a job at Harvard to work with Skinner. But I didn't take that.

A: okay - why did you-

B: Well I was also offered a teaching job at the University of Colorado.

A: Oh, okay, so you chose a teaching job - a more stable job - over another research position.

B: Well I chose a job that was more of a job than sitting at the feet of Skinner.

A: What did you think of Skinner?

B: He was a big man. (laughs) And it was clear that the job would be doing Skinner's work. I mean I had a great deal of respect for Skinner and his work, a great deal. But no, I chose this job at the University of Colorado in Boulder even though it was a temporary job. It was replacing - uh this was sort of a curve in my career - it was replacing someone who had left suddenly who had been teaching group dynamics, (laughs) about which I knew very little but I learned. So I took that job and that was a really good deal, a good deal for me.

A: And how did you find that then, taking on this next stage in your career as a single woman, non-married, divorced?

B: Oh it was lovely. I had two years of being a gay divorcee. It was fine. Because I had gone from living at home - I'd never been to a college as anything other than a commuter - so I'd gone from my parents' apartment to married life. It was nice. But then I got married right away (laughs) after that.

A: (laughs) Okay, to (B: to Al) to Al. (B: yeah yeah). And how did you, did you meet in Colorado?

B: We met my very very first day in the department in Boulder, when he and John Schopler and their dog knocked on my door as I was putting books away, offering to help. Sweet. They were graduate students. Remember again, see, the war - older than average students, there were a lot of them. Even though this was the late '50s, but still a lot of the guys had had their careers interrupted, so they were graduate students but finishing, they were finishing up. And I was, at that point I was 26 and an assistant professor at Colorado.

A: Right. And at that point where was your research moving?

B: My research has always been within that sphere of pursuing narrowly or widely-constructed social issues, empirically. Since I had to teach and learn about group dynamics I started to do some research on group cohesiveness. But again what I did with group cohesiveness was to translate that construct into positive attitudes, so I really stayed with positive attitudes and negative attitudes one way or another. To this day it has stuck.

So that's what I did. I mean I translated that whole concept in a very different way from the way it had been measured and conceptualized.

A: You've mentioned APA and getting a job at convention. (B: oh yeah) At what point

did you become actively involved in APA?

B: Very recently. I mean I joined APA as a student at UCLA but I was not an active organizational insider until I started doing some things for [Division] 35 and then one thing led to another. Actually it was Rhoda Unger who said "Why don't you run for president?" I said "no no no," but I did and I ran and I won. That's never really been a focus. It's just sort of a sideline. It's not a focus - organizational issues are not really my [thing] - it's the outcomes. (laughs). I mean now that I'm in APA and struggling to get them - it - to recognize social class, that's very exciting, but that's a whole different thing. It's the outcome and it's SPSSI. You know there are outcomes rather than the joy of being (laughs) on council. No, that's not my main thing

A: Well we'll get to some of that as we move through this. One of the issues that it seems has also been a constant - not a constant - but certainly appears prominently in your work is gender. (B: yes) And when and how would you say you first identified yourself as a feminist?

B: Well certainly those of us who were politically active when I was, you know, a teenager and in my 20s, that was not a word we used. We talked about the woman question. There was always talk about the woman question. But you know later on when the word "feminist" became more generally used it was easy. I mean of course I had been a feminist, so the identification was no great leap.

A: Right, right. Now after Colorado it appears as though you went to Kentucky and were there for almost a decade.

B: Right. I was in Colorado for two years. Al, who I married after that two-year period, had gotten a job at the University of Kentucky the year before when he graduated. I went and joined him. I mean these dates are ridiculous because I'm talking to someone who is a baby here (A: laughs) But (laughs) we got married in 1958 when I was 28. So then we were both in Kentucky. Al was in the university. Kentucky was not the deep south, but it was totally segregated. Lexington was totally segregated. The state was totally segregated. The University was totally white. I got a job, and again, see, I don't know, I've sort of been blessed. I got a job which again was so important in my life. I got a job at the Black school. The White school was in Lexington. The Black school was in Frankfurt, the capital of Kentucky, and it was like the other Black schools that had been set up right after the Civil War during the reconstruction period. There were a number of them around the country. And this was Kentucky State College- Black, all Black, except for me.

A: I was going to say, was the faculty Black as well?

B: Everybody was Black except me. (laughs) Again -, a different time, crazy things. I had written to the President. He called me in for an interview. Rufus Atwood, one of the great autocrats of the (laughs) historically Black colleges. A huge wonderful man who interviewed me, hired me on the spot, took me by the hand, introduced me to the chair of

the psychology/education department, just like that. And of course the chair had not been consulted, I mean they needed someone to teach. I was perfectly happy to do the job. But you know, it was total autocracy. For me it was absolutely extraordinary. The next ten years of my life were spent at Kentucky State. It was extraordinary for a lot of reasons. First, because there was this huge social class and political chasm (let alone color which was totally unimportant), but social class and political chasm between me and the faculty. They were Black bourgeoisie. I was this radical White peasant woman (laughs) from a different world. And then there were the '60s. So all during the '60s I was at Kentucky State. They were totally wonderful to me, totally wonderful. I was able to have three children in the '60s. They gave me wonderful schedules to let me do this. There were years when I taught two classes back to back. I'd come in the morning, teach one class for three hours, have lunch, teach another class. They were just so fantastically flexible. So I was able to do a lot of things in Kentucky, in Lexington. Al and I became active in C.O.R.E - Congress of Racial Equality. This is going to sound weird but it's absolutely true. A small band of about twenty of us integrated the city because they thought we were hundreds. It was a small group of C.O.R.E. people, Black and White. We did the sit-ins, we integrated the movie houses, house, just one, the hotel, everything. I mean we worked, we went to meetings, we did all of these things. So it was a very heady period, the '60s. And then also we had three young kids at the same time. We were both working. It was very exciting, the '60s.

A: Were you involved in the women's movement?

B: Mmm. Not as clearly. Although the women's movement was part of everything. But the focus in Kentucky during the '60s was definitely on civil rights. There was no question that was, you know, that was right there front and center. But yeah, there were women involved. There was no leadership, so we can't say leadership, but yeah.

A: You've been a member of the Association for Women in Psychology. (B: oh yeah) How did you...

B: Almost from the very beginning, almost. I wasn't part of the original group, I don't know, that was the early '70s. Where was I in the early '70s? We left Kentucky well in between, I mean we went to Japan for a year. In between that period we went back to California for a year, and throughout this time I was doing research too. I was doing research. You were at the (A: uh-huh well with the elders), well Robert Guthrie, who was another one of these wonderful elders, we worked with his father in Lexington. Robert Guthrie's father was principal of the Black high school. Yeah, very interesting. Robert, I think, was already out of the house, but Al and I wrote a book called *Black and White Youth*. I think that was the title of it. But anyway Bob Guthrie's father, I remember him very well. He was a wonderful guy who let us into his high school. So I was doing research, doing that research. We had some grant money to study attitudinal issues, - we were working on liking and disliking. We were working on issues of attraction - again the same theme, and the acquisition of liking and the consequences of liking. So we were doing that. And then we left Kentucky to go to Rhode Island. So to answer your AWP question it was some time in that period, the early '70s, that I got involved in AWP, from

almost the very beginning.

A: Right. And what attracted you to that group?

B: AWP? (A: yeah) Well obvious (laughs) (A: radical) associations, well women in psychology - I mean gender had always been, not always a focus, but always there, definitely.

A: So what was your involvement with them, as a member? Or as a -

B: Well AWP is relatively leaderless. As a contributing, strong, supportive member.

A: Did that group appeal to you more than say, what was then forming as Division 35?

B: No, I was probably already in the division – no, was I already in 35? I was in 35 early on. The first divisions that I became a member of were 8 and 9, as a graduate student probably. Then as soon as there was a 35, I was a member of 35. I'm also now a member of 1 - I don't know, they just found me, (laughs) put me in, but that's good. I do belong in 1 because in a lot of ways I'm a generalist.

The sequence I don't remember exactly – 35, AWP, but in the '70s when I got into the University of Rhode Island - which was also through hustling - I did not get a job right away. My husband got a job. I followed and just like it had been in Riverside, I first started out teaching extension. (laughs) Then I started on the path of the exploited person-taking sabbatical faculty places even though I was teaching the giant introductory psych class which I started out teaching to 900 students. Then again one of these weird, quirky things happened. University of Rhode Island was starting a new college - a university college for freshmen and sophomores (first and second-year students). It was a brand new concept then. This was in 1972, spring of '72, and somebody suggested that I apply for it. And I said "ha ha ha ha, don't be silly." But I applied for it and I got the job, which was sort of weird because this was also the time that the **AAUP** was unionizing the faculty and I was of course a strong (A: uh-uh) **AAUP** union supporter. I got the job. When I became dean of a college, which had never ever been a plan, I sort of wised up and insisted that I have a faculty appointment in psychology.

A: So it was at your insistence, in a way.

B: Yeah. I said you want me as dean - put me on the faculty in psychology. So that's it, and I did it. At URI ever since. I stayed as dean of that college for six years. All during that time I also taught at least one class in psychology at my insistence. Graduate students found me somehow. I had lots and lots of graduate students. But so I stayed as dean and then just stepped out of the deanship at a certain point and have been at URI ever since. But to go back to your feminist question – again, see, I have to take you into the '70s when you were like two days old right? (A: laughs) Okay, there was a group of incredibly wonderful women - again how this happened, we found each other, all relatively young assistant professors, some a little bit older, at the University of Rhode

Island. And these women were from a variety of disciplines and we just coalesced and we developed a women's studies program which to this day is, you know, like a jewel. But there were these, all these incredibly wonderful, wonderful women- we are just celebrating, I think, the 30th, 35th, something like that, anniversary of the women's studies program.

A: Now when you were putting together that program, did you have any models with which to work at that point?

B: Not really. There were a few here and there. But it was at the time that a lot of schools (oh I don't know about a lot of other schools) were doing what we were doing. I taught one of the first psych of women classes in the country. How did that happen? Again a lot of it is - my good wonderful fortune. This was in 1971. I wasn't even on the formal faculty yet. I was in the hustling phase, but I had an office and I was teaching this, I was teaching that. I did not have a tenure-track appointment in the department. It was 1971, a group of women students came knocking on my door and they said "We want a class on women in psychology and you have to do it." And so I did.

A: How did your department react?

B: Well it started out as an experimental course. (laughs) And of course it was popular. And then we went from my class into a group-led class that was in the college, but had you know history faculty, sociology, psychology, English, whatever. We had that and then we started developing more and more and more and putting together a women's studies program.

A: Amazing yeah (B: yeah) yeah.

B: So again it was a combination of the times (A: Yeah, and demand for it, it sounds like) and demand for it and just fantastically competent women who were just beginning, and who were resonating with the times. Feminism was alive and well in Rhode Island all during the '70s, and still is.

A: Well I was going to ask you just now for your reflections on what feminism has done for psychology? (B: So much) In what ways do you think feminism has changed psychology, in your view?

B: Well it has not just [changed] psychology. Anthropology, sociology, history, English, these are the areas I know the most - the social sciences and the humanities. It has just broadened the scope of issues. It has raised questions. It [psychology] has certainly become much more exciting and much broader and healthier (laughs) and more diverse. I mean it's just, of course it's part and parcel of the whole multicultural emphasis, and just exciting. I mean the dissertations that have come in that have been produced by feminist graduate students like mine and others, I mean there are others, not just me - they're just wonderful. Talking about things that psychologists never ever ever talked about before.

A: And where do you think there is still work left to be done in terms of transforming psychology in the ways that feminism has been able to do, to some extent? Where do you think...

B: Well I think the transformation is continuing, continuing forever and ever - transforming as long as there are new questions that have been lying dormant for one reason or another that people have not been picking up, but transformation based on the recognition and the diversity of the human animal. That's why I'm so excited now about having psychology recognize the significance of social class, which is you know one of these crazy things that all these years has been a no-no for reasons that we only partially understand. So now there's social class. There were all of the diverse ethnicities, there were all the questions that still need to be answered having to do with race and the isms and oh innumerable... I mean, as long as there's human behavior which is fascinating, there are new questions, new constructs, new problems.

And of course I personally would love to see psychology emboldened. It's very hard you know, for what is psychology after all? Am I talking about APA? Yes and no. Am I talking about SPSSI? Yes and no (laughs). Division 35? So it's either organizational or not. But emboldened somewhere along the line, either by groups within, or the organizations, to tackle some of the most horrendous contemporary problems. This is not your problem as a Canadian, but we are crazy in this country not to have a universal health system. I mean psychologists have to deal with this. We're supposed to be interested in advancing human welfare. The data are so stark, and the solutions are so pitiful, and somehow there is this disconnect between this enormous social problem and what we as psychologists are willing to even say about it. There's a certain timidity about this issue.

A: Why do you think psychologists have been reluctant to engage in -

B: Well, people want to make a living. (laughs)

A: So studying poverty is not...

B: Well, you know, part of it, it's not just psychology. It's a lot of middle-class people, middle-class disciplines, so there's a protection of your own, you know, your own employment status. A lot of fear. Don't get me started talking about prescription privileges. It's a horrible thing that psychologists are doing and yet to say that now is to be stoned.

A: I'd like to talk to you about that as well.

B: You've got to hide because APA has gone on record, and this is a big thing. But you know I personally think it's a real sad mistake. But I can also understand that people who practice are very very concerned with their livelihoods. That's easier in a way to understand than the concern with livelihood through grant procurement and being on the right side of the federal government. That's a whole other issue...So you say what

transformation? (laughs) There are a lot of issues, a lot of issues. Selling the research, putting, hmmm, how can I put this delicately? Compromising one's research in the interests of the status quo and the personal hand-in-the-till of the grant. But that wasn't too delicate was it? (A: I get your point) That was not so delicate, but you know, I mean you understand what I'm trying to (A: yeah), I mean that's sort of sad. And you know APA is sometimes in that very delicate position of not wanting to make enemies on the Hill, so we have a lot of issues, a lot of....

A: Yeah. (B: yeah). Well I know you're still a very active researcher and psychologist (B: yes) especially in the area of classism and so on. But looking back on your career, what would you say in your career as a psychologist has been your major contribution?

B: I can't answer that question. (laughs)

A: No no – it's too late?? (laughs)

B: No I mean I can't, I can't assess my own contribution, if any, if there even has been a contribution - I mean it's just you know, it's just what I do, and if it's of any value, that's great! I would probably do it anyway. I had a lot of graduate students, and that's been really important to me. But I can't assess, I can assess your contribution, or Wade's, or somebody else's, but certainly not my own.

A: Okay. Is there anything that you would like to ask, Wade? Go ahead.

W: Well I'd like you to talk more, explain more, your views about class and its effects - not only in society, but in how psychology has been shaped by its lack of attention to class issues, or its willingness to ignore them. What kind of prefaces or undergirds my statement is, I was going through some archival material and in it I came across some proposals back in the early 1970s by a psychologist named David Gray, if I remember the name correctly, in which he was urging APA to take on class issues.

B: David Gray. You know I think he wrote to me (W: mm-hmm). I think he sent me a letter and a statement after I published my paper on the invisibility of class. The paper in the *American Psychologist*. So that sounds very familiar, yeah.

W: But can you talk some about your views on class and its impact on psychology, and maybe organized psychology's attempt to - if you perceive it that way - to ignore issues of class?

B: Well, issues of class have been ignored. That's sort of an objective [statement] -we can show that. (laughs) It shouldn't be ignored because as data from here, there, and everywhere -including psychology lately – clearly, clearly shows, it is a variable of significance in almost every aspect of human life. In my work my focus is really the United States. I'm not even talking about Great Britain, China, India, I'm not even - you know it's just my focus, so it's so definitely focused on the United States...But you know, what aspect of human life is not a function of access to resources? And that's what

what we're talking about. Access to resources. And we're talking about education, we're talking about child development. We're talking about physical health, we're talking about mental health. We're talking about income. We're talking about entertainment. We're talking about anything - any area of functioning. Self-regard, language, dress. (laughs) You know? And the data keep coming in - and for us to be ignoring that variable is strange. Do you want me to say anything (W: well I'm interested -) more? Are you getting at something that I'm not touching on, I think?

W: No. I wonder about how that can be parsed, if it needs to be parsed, in terms of issues that have often been focused on or the attention that has been focused on race/ethnicity in the United States. I'm not sure about elsewhere. How much are some of what's often been complained rightfully, so it seems to me, about the oppressive nature of psychology as a discipline on race, of people of color, and how much is that also so in regard to people who are not middle class, especially people who are of lower-income groups.

B: Oh, social science in general has been part of the problem. I mean people still talk about the lower class. It's a horrible, horrible designation. The word "working class" is something that is so difficult for psychologists to deal with. At SPSSI council tomorrow I think we're going to be - I hope - talking about the fact that SPSSI is going to hold its convention in Long Beach in a non-union hotel. We don't think about (laughs) what that means because, you know when Robert Guthrie wrote that all the rats are white, all people are middle class (laughs). And it's just a total disregard - I mean aside from you know the people who are very very poor. This is another example - when Division 35 started its task force on poverty it started as a task force on welfare and welfare reform. Now when I got into it at the very beginning, my sort of battle-cry (laughs) was I will not study welfare reform. The problem is not welfare. The problem is poverty, and so we shifted the gears. But the first thing was welfare reform, and look at all the people who make their fortunes out of welfare reform. It's just, you know, that's not the issue. The issue is poverty in this country. So that task force with an extraordinarily powerful group of people - what we did was to study poor women, and out of our study of poor women came the APA's resolution on socioeconomic class and poverty which was finally passed in 2000. The council of representatives passed it because we worked with what was then the Committee on Urban Initiatives and they moved it through council and through all the various boards and committees and so on. And then of course the council in its un-wisdom got rid of the Committee on Urban Initiatives. (laughs) But that, that's just an example you know. Our language and our focus on welfare yes, poverty no.

W: Let me follow-up a little bit (B: yeah). It strikes me that since the late '60s, due in large part to the activism of Black psychologists in the late '60s, APA has increasingly turned its attention to begin to try to redress some issues around race and ethnicity - still a long way to go, it seems. (B: yes) But at the same time so many of those issues are issues of class as well, and yet that word is, really it seems to me, kind of a dirty word (B: yes) among middle class folks. (B: yeah) What needs to be done to change that so that psychology can be inclusive, not just of multiplicity of races and ethnicities, but inclusive of all classes as well?

B: Certainly some of the researchers are turning their attention to class - I mean you can't do good research in the area of health anymore without coming face to face with SES. It's just that poor people, just as in American politics, don't have any anybody helping, giving them voice. I mean there are no lobbyists on Capitol Hill, or maybe one. I mean there are union lobbyists, but even the unions, for example - they're not tackling a single payer health plan. Why? I think we know why. The unions don't tackle that, they don't push it because they use that as a bargaining chip in making contracts with the auto industry. They want, you know, a health plan for their workers and it's a bargaining chip.

So poor people don't have a constituency like Black psychologists, Asian American psychologists, Native American psychologists, so that's crazy. Because it doesn't mean that the issues and the problems don't need to be tackled. So I mean I can't answer your question really except that there are many many different paths that those of us who are concerned and interested have to be moving along. I mean hopefully - and I'm not really looking forward to this - but hopefully at the February Council meeting (next week actually) when the council of representatives meets here in Washington, a compromise proposal will be voted on calling for a task force, an APA task force, a two-year task force, on SES. Unfortunately, for reasons that some of us can't quite put our finger on, that compromise initiative which came out of BAPPI, you know BAPPI right? Well of course you do. It's still in business pending in the core agenda. It's not even in the main agenda so I've been getting some very good advice now from Gwen [Puryear Keita] on this issue and how to move it. I'm not looking forward to having to do that, but I'm going to do that and somehow move that resolution into the main agenda. Are you going to be there? (W: mm-hmm) yeah ok, so I'm going to try to move it into the main agenda so at least we can get a vote on that and hopefully a positive vote so that APA will at least have a task force to get started. If the task force gets started I think a permanent committee will come next, because there is just - as I'm sure you know - an enormous amount of research from everywhere pointing to the significance of social class, so it's not going to be a difficult job to show the significance of this. It's just a little bit of finagling on the floor that, as I said, I'm not looking forward to, but I'll do it. And Gwen [Puryear Keita], bless her heart, has now really become very very interested in moving this. Yeah, we had this wonderful - I don't know if either of you were there - this wonderful session on classism and Gwen was there. There was so much energy there. Oh it was really great. And then we also had a good session on social justice at the conference. But you know Gwen I think has just now decided that this really has to happen and so she's been very helpful, and with her support I think it will pass...

A: So the Women's Program Office is behind it?

B: Looks that way. (A: good) (laughs) (A: they should be) Yeah, they should be in a way because it was, as I said, this task force out of Division 35 that got this whole thing started in APA. Anything more?

W: There is always more but...

B: I don't know if I answered your question.

W: I wanted you to talk about it for the tape as much as -

B: Oh ok, for the tape. (laughs)

W: I mean I'm certainly personally interested (A: yeah) but also..

B: What are you going to do with this, by the way?

A: We are going to send you a copy and also deposit it at the Division 35 archives (B: uh-huh) which is also at APA (B: okay), and you will get a chance to look at it, edit it in any way you like, and also I would like eventually, as part of this oral history program, to at least be able to make available excerpts from the interviews perhaps in an on-line medium. I've constructed a Heritage Website for Division 35, so maybe there. Wade and others are also working on possibly producing some various documentaries on various issues that could be used for teaching purposes. Having a body of interviews with people like you, that you could take excerpts from, that kind of thing. (B: very good)

W: DVDs on-line, that sort of thing.

B: Oh, very good.