

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**

**Interview with Bonnie Strickland**

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford  
Newport, RI  
March 13, 2009*

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**March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009**

BS: Bonnie Strickland, Interview participant

AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

JM: Jenna Mackay, Audience Member

KS: Kate Sheese, Audience Member

KV: Kelli Vaughn, Audience Member

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AR: For the record we need you to state your full name and place and place of birth.

BS: Bonnie Ruth Strickland, Louisville, Kentucky, 1936.

AR: Great. One of the ways we start the interviews is by asking people to tell us how they developed their identity as a feminist.

BS: Wow, that is a hard one because it feels like when I was growing up, the women's movement was way in the future. And [in] my working class neighborhood, people took on very stereotypical gender roles. I think I always felt a little different. I always enjoyed boy-type things. My mom was good enough to give me a chemistry set, at some point, and I always had an interest in science and reading. There was not much opportunity to go to college back then. And we didn't have the money, but my high school gym teacher just sent me off to Alabama College. I had scholarships and waited on tables and found a whole new world out there. Then another faculty member at the college sent me off to graduate school. He did that for several of us, whether we wanted to or not and regardless of whether we knew anything about graduate school. And maybe this was one of the first affirmative action [programs] that I was aware of - in Ohio State. At the time, they were taking on a really diverse group of people into the clinical program. There was a nun in the program, a priest and I am sure they thought that I was black, anyone from Alabama College and the deep South named Bonnie Ruth. I am sure they thought it was a reach-out. And there were other black students in the program. So I got to Ohio State and I am sure they did not know what to do with me. I was the only southerner. I was not black. I always asked my mentor, I'd say, "You thought that I was black, didn't you?" And he'd say, "No, no, no, but we knew that you were culturally deprived." He was just kidding, I think... I think.

AR: Do you remember what your reaction to that was?

BS: I just remember he was right and it was just an anomaly for me to be there in Ohio State, especially being out of the South. I had never been further South than Tennessee. Literally, when my professor and I applied to graduate schools, they just weren't taking women and he said, "You know, if you get into Ohio State, that will be the place to go." It was arguably the best clinical program back then. And my grades were very good. I was a phys-ed major, but I had no math, no statistics. I had a little biology, but no chemistry, no sciences, and no languages. But I had tennis, swimming, softball, and basketball. I could referee games and I assumed that is

what I would do, go and become a schoolteacher in the South. And **Herb Eaver**, the professor, said, “Look, try psychology for a year and if you don’t like it, you can always come back and teach.” Of course, once I got to Ohio State, I was culturally deviant.

AR: You felt that way vis-à-vis your peers?

BS: Right, I had never met a Republican. I did not know any Yankees and my prejudices growing up were about those Yankees who conquered us at one point. But they always treated me, at least it felt like in the program, like everyone else. I did not see or feel any discrimination, except that which is generally in the society, or culture. Once I graduated, and again, I had started publishing early in graduate school, so I was in line for some university positions and I did interviews with some major Midwest universities. I got a note back from Indiana University that said, “Bonnie Strickland’s record is very good, but we have decided to hire a man (underlined), instead.” And so, Dr. Rotter found me a job late in the summer at Emory University.

And, again, I was the one of the first women on the faculty there. Two years after I joined the faculty, the dean of women resigned and so they looked around for some women and I was one of the only ones. So, all of a sudden, I was 27 and dean of women at Emory University! There were some role models as deans of women who were not women, but it always felt back then that I was in a strange place. I guess I was, but I didn’t feel so strange. People were very compassionate, very generous, and it didn’t feel like people placed me – I am sure they did – in a woman’s role. I recall one time going for lunch with the director of the program at Emory and he opened the door for me and he said, “Oh, I am sorry,” then he said, “Oh, no, I’m not.” It was kind of always walking this line of being equal and being different, or being separate.

All of this is a long way of getting up to my professional career at Emory and being one of the few women faculty. There just weren’t role models. They just weren’t there. I did have the good fortune of going to a women’s college and one of the psychology faculty there was a woman. So, I think I did see that early on. I started doing research, not on women’s issues, it was more African American children and levels of aspiration and I also did work in the civil rights movements. We did the internal-external locus of control scale.

AR: And that was a direct result of your work with Rotter?

BS: Yeah, we, Rotter and **Pearl** \_\_\_\_, who was an African American student in my class, we had gone to [inaudible] and asked students there: would they do nothing, would they sign a petition, would they march, would they take a freedom ride across the south for civil rights? And sure enough, the more internal [their locus of control], the more likely they were to do more dramatic social action. So, we sent it to the [Journal of] Personality & Social, and he wrote back and said it was all very interesting. It was all paper and pencil. So, when I got to Atlanta, we had folks at Emory who were very involved in the civil rights movement and they were having a meeting of the SNCC - the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. And we thought, “What a wonderful sample.” The mean number of arrests for the group was four and one guy had been arrested 64 times over in Mississippi on voter registration. So we gave them the internal-external locus of control scale and they were all black men - and some put human when we asked for race back then - and sure enough, the more social activist they were, the more likely they were to say they were to be internal. Then we had another sample and the less social activist they were, the more likely they were to be external. So I wrote it up, sent it to Personality & Social and Dan

Katz wrote back and said interesting study, but Gore & Rotter (12:31) have already done it. Eventually, it was published in the *Journal of Social Psychology* and became a citation classic.

So anyway, a lot of my research was not on women's issues at the beginning. [It was] more on marginalized folks or different folk, and maybe that was because I always felt a little different.

AR: Well, you mentioned that you were really involved in the civil rights movement and you were doing research and meeting leaders in that field. Just a little bit thereafter was the women's movement - how did you negotiate that? How did you get involved in the women's movement?

BS: Well, in the South, we were always a little late on everything and that was certainly true of the women's movement. In some ways, it came through the American Psychological Association and, again, it was through Rotter. He was an officer in the division of clinical psychology and they decided they wanted an equal opportunity and affirmative action committee, this was in 1973, and, again, they looked around at the few women they knew. Rhoda [Unger] knew me, so they asked me to chair the committee. And then there were three other women on the committee and I think at some point we had a black male on the committee, but I think at some point the charge was to look at the discrimination against women - as if we could do that - particularly in psychology, and to really put together a statistical base of who was there and who was getting hired and promoted. They wanted to really try and eliminate discrimination and prejudice. So, we looked first at women, then at ethnic minority folk, and then at gay and lesbians. From that, there was really an opening of my eyes to women's issues. Then from there [I] stayed involved in the division of clinical psychology. I am not clear about all of this, but it seemed this interest in the socially marginalized was true in psychology as well, the fact that we didn't have women in psychology. I was the third female president of the clinical division and then eventually the 7<sup>th</sup> woman president of APA, but there were wonderful women who began to come together, especially in the psychology association. I remember I was with Janet Spence, it must have been in 1967, and the APA was to go to Chicago. Chicago had just had the riots with the Democratic Convention, so to have APA move out of that city... I remember sitting in a room with Janet Spence, then a few others came in, and we were debating how to move APA in this direction. Of course, we were all for equal rights and the equal rights amendment came out a bit later. So, I don't know if I am answering your question.

AR: Actually, I wanted to take you back a bit, tell me about your clinical training during your graduate work because I know that was a big part of your training in addition to your research. You are a practicing clinician. Give us a sense of Ohio State in the early 1960s and the state of clinical psychology.

BS: Well, it was really interesting. I went from 1958 to 1962 and the Boulder conference had been a decade earlier and, I am not sure, I think we were accredited because somebody decided we could train clinical psychologists. Again **Rhoda** was there and George Kelley. [There were] seven male faculty and then there was a woman named **Emily Stockdale**. I never knew going in where she came from or what she did, but she had an office and I remember that she had some plants in her office and the guys didn't have plants in their offices. And she was lovely. I never did any work with her or even talked to her, but she was there. (17:30) and the clinical program made certain to try and get someone to represent all of the major theories of the time. So, we had the social learning theorist, and then we had a psychoanalyst. We had an existentialist. George Kelley was his own person on phenomenological psychology and personal construct theory. So, we sat on different research teams and floated around. We learned, not only someone's

theoretical arguments, but how to confront other people around different theoretical problems. We had to take the philosophy of the sciences. It was very cerebral kind of training. We also ran our own clinic and in my first year, I was a clerk at a veteran's hospital, in the mental health ward there. Then in my second year, I continued work in the VA. In my third year, I went to Palo Alto and was on the ward that Ken Kesey was writing his book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, on. I saw him, but I didn't really know him.

AR: At that point you didn't really know who he was or what he was doing.

BS: No. We knew he was an English major, but he was an assistant on the ward.

AR: What did you think when you saw the movie?

BS: Well, I went home and got back to Columbus and my supervisor said, "You will want to look up this book, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. I think you will see some of your patients there." And then he added, "I don't think he was really fair to Nurse Loretta," of course, Nurse Ratched. So, I picked up the book and tried to figure out who everyone was. Of course, they were amalgamated. Then I saw the film and I guess all I remember is that they really weren't that fair to the nurse.

AR: Can you tell us a little bit about how your personal life was developing at this time? Clearly graduate training can be all encompassing, but you are from the South, without a psychology background. What was going on personally?

BS: I didn't say a word for two years. I sat in classes and I remember that Levant was teaching and mentioned Skinner and I was like, "Skinner... I know I know that name." At which point a guy in the front responded, "When I was with Fred at Harvard..." And then they mentioned Carl Rogers and I was like, "Carl Rogers... I think he is a preacher," and then this woman said, "When I was with Carl at the University of Chicago..." and I thought, "You have made a wrong turn somewhere on this road of life." So, I never said anything until there was this one time where I felt like I knew more than my classmates did. We were taking some sort of culture free test and you had to pick what was similar between three objects – a watch, a clock, and a tree stump. The tree had been cut down, you could see the rings on it and so I immediately said, "time." Everyone was like, "How did you think of that?" I was like, "You know, tree trunk rings show a year." And maybe it was from growing up in the country, but I did have something. Interestingly, I felt so isolated, so different, that I ended up rooming with a black woman. At least we ate the same food and talked the same language.

(21:59)

We just felt more comfortable together than I think I would have with those white Yankees. I also recall a time when there was a party with the graduate students and I realized I was sitting in a room full of Yankees - mostly white Yankees. That was a prejudice I had. I never had been on the same bus as a black person, the same class, and drank from the same water fountain. I guess I always felt sort of similar. I don't recall a prejudice against African Americans, though I am sure it was there. There were a lot of Jewish kids in my school and I didn't even know there was a prejudice against Jews until I was in my 30s, but I heard about it from some of the faculty. But Yankees, yes.

AR: Later in your career you have written about your sexual identity. What was going on with that at this time in your life?

BS: Well, I think I was always different. I always wanted to play boys' games. Even though I was a Phys-Ed major, we had to put a skirt over our shorts. Again, it never occurred to me that that was a [form of] oppression; it was just the way things were. And that has been the whole story of my life. I was there and it was just the way things were. But somehow, I felt different and it wasn't a big thing to get involved in the civil rights movement. Of course, there weren't many white women involved. We use to go out for food with the faculty and we would ask the restaurant, "Do you serve black people?" And if they said, "No, of course not," the three of us white women would turn around and walk away and think of them wondering, "Which one of them was black?" In terms of my sexual identity, I think I was 16 when I knew for sure. I knew that I liked women and I knew that it was a terrible thing. I went to the Bible, which was no great comfort. I read novels, which had awful endings like *The Well of Loneliness*. As far as I knew, I never met a gay or lesbian because we didn't have those terms back then. I did get fascinated by this book that Christine Jorgenson wrote. She was one of the first trans people who went through transition. So, I knew more about trans folk than I did about gays and lesbians.

But when I was 12 or 14, I was named [inaudible] on the YMCA boy's baseball team. My mom was not happy and decided that I really should not be playing with the boys anyways. Now, she would have reconsidered her decision if she knew that I walked across the field and found a softball team of lesbians. Oh man, I was home. They wore pants. They had keys on their belts. They sharpened their cleats. They taught me how to play ball. I was about 14 and they were all a bit older. They never mentioned anything about being gay or lesbian. They never said anything. They were very protective of me. They were great. I still have a cap that one of the women gave me, the first baseman, and it has the emblem of the team on the front. I still have it packed away with a few other things from those days. I would on occasion go see her, in her nursing home, when I went back. We would reminisce about how we came to be and where we are now. I did have occasion to go back to many of the same players, some 42 years after those games. Including the first woman I ever kissed and that was quite the interesting reunion, as you can imagine. But they were still very closeted. I tried to get them to go on a gay march with me in Birmingham and they wouldn't. This was just a few years back. Again, it was a very marginalized group.

The other thing I love about this group is that they taught me how to fight. They put keys between their fingers, which you used to slash people and the team was quite rivaled. I remember one time we came out and our tires were slashed so we jumped in the cars that were available and went to this bar where folks gathered after the games where the other team was. So there was a scuffle, we went outside, and they decided to just let two women fight and we used keys to keep people out of the circle. That was kind of a unique situation for me. It was when I could do anything. (28:06)

In graduate school, in college and graduate school, you knew if you were out, you would be tossed out – into a mental hospital, likely, but you would immediately be expelled. (28:15) In graduate school it **wasn't** an issue. I met a couple of lesbians and it turns out there were a couple of gay men who I never knew about until much later.

AR: How did it feel to be involved in a profession that pathologized homosexuality in the 1960s and 70s?

BS: Again, it was just the way it was. But it was leading a double life. Especially when I went back to Emory to teach. They never met my partner. Although we did bowl together and my partner and I would bowl with two of the guys. But if I was to go anywhere for a social event I would bring a guy. It would almost always be a gay guy. And they were handsome and charming and the faculty would be very pleased. But I decided I would rather have a wife than be one. I mean I like guys and I dated a lot but there was no emotional connection like there was with women.

AR: In this period did you ever work with gay and lesbian clients?

BS: In the mid-60s it turns out that I did have a gay student, **Norm Thompson**. I was his supervisor and this was really his research, but we found 100 gay men to be involved and 100 straight men. And then we found 100 straight women, but only 68 lesbians. It was a snowball method. I knew people and they would invite people. This was after Evelyn Hooker's responses and, of course, she didn't find any differences in mental health. So, we looked at mental health and developmental issues and, sure enough, it came out that the gay men and straight men were similar and the lesbians and straight folk were similar in terms of mental health. The pathology just wasn't there. The other thing we found that we never made a big thing out of was that lesbian women looked a little more independent and healthy than straight women did. Now that makes sense, but back then we didn't quite believe the data. It turns out that women who become more independent and take on roles that are more masculine end up healthier in the mental health literature.

AR: That was a pretty huge study. I mean, Hooker didn't even have a lesbian sample.

BS: No, this was probably the first one; the first large scale studies on lesbians. It was published in 1969.

AR: Did you have any reactions when the APA took homosexuality out in 1973? Do you remember any strong reactions?

BS: I don't really remember much of it. I remember, in APA, the beginning of the women's movement. And it wasn't until the eighties that we had a division for gay, lesbian, and bisexual folk.

AR: Can you tell us a bit about the origins of that? You are the current president.

BS: I was noticing that there was a gap between 1980 and 1987 when Lynn put her list of women APA presidents up on the board. Again, looking back, Florence was there and Janet Spence was there. I came along with the division of clinical psychology. I had been president of that division and by 1986, and I was president-elect of the association. I had been on the council of representatives and Steve Moran was particularly active. I remember the women's caucus, there probably was not more than a dozen women on council. What we were still looking at back then was ethnic minorities and what they said was when they rotated off, there would be no ethnic minorities on the council. There was a kind of sensitivity about ethnic minorities, but not about gay and lesbian folk and Steve began to agitate for the division. **But I regressed;** maybe a dozen on council and Nancy Russo said we needed to have a meeting. At lunch, we pulled some tables together and you could tell the guys were more than curious. And that was the beginning

of the women's caucus and, you can see, there are now fifty women on council. Fifty percent of the folks on council are women. That division, there was just so much ferment in the 1970s, but, for the APA, that ferment was more in the 80's. I remember the excitement when that division was anointed and started. It has never been a very large division, but folks have been very loyal. And you put your votes in how you wish and your number of council members based on those recommendations. The gay, lesbian, bisexual and soon to be transgender division has three for about a 1000-person division. And the clinical division is fussing over their 10 votes. We have them.

AR: What have been some of the issues over the years?

(35:18)

BS: Every major issue about gay and lesbian events and, early on, it was more, "this is not pathology. This is not a disease." I guess the general things and moving into decriminalizing gay and lesbian activities. I remember in Atlanta, back when I was at Emory, the police were still copying license plates to keep track of who was going to the gay bars and private parties of lesbians and gay men. The police just raided these parties.

AR: Did you personally feel unsafe at this time?

BS: Uh...I didn't. I just knew I couldn't be out and I wasn't in Atlanta. I don't know if I thought of myself as unsafe, but I knew I would be if I was out.

AR: Tell us about the transition from Emory to...

BS: (Laughs) Emory was very wealthy. It was a men's school for the ten years before I went there. So, the Vietnam War comes along and the peace rallies. We had aggression rallies. The only motto for Emory was "Apathy." Literally, the students affirmed Vietnam. They had come and flew banners over the school and city, affirming Vietnam. Some of the major figures would come through and say that this was the only school where the administration was more liberal than the students were. And the dean of administration was wonderful. We were trying to do what we could. Somewhere before that, we tried to be more involved in the civil rights movement. I had the privilege of meeting Dr. King and we went to this meeting where there was a dinner; it was when he won the Nobel Peace Prize. And **Irv** said, "Do you want to go meet him?" He had already met him. And I said, "Of course!" So, we went up and I said, "Thank you for all that you do." I remember he shook my hand and said, "Well, thank you!" And he was always that generous sort of soul.

The other thing that strikes me as interesting now is that we had no idea that the civil rights movement was so centered in Atlanta in those years and became the movement that it was. Martin Luther King was a preacher in that area. That never scared me. Again, I was involved, but it seemed the right and proper thing to do. I was threatened when I became dean of women. I was 27, very young, and very liberal. It was when the John Birch Society was very big. They were anti-communist, very conservative, and on the far right. And I heard from a psychiatrist friend that some guy in the John Birch Society was going to plant some guy, get me involved with him, and dig up something they could use against me as dean of women. As far as I know, it never happened, but there were those kinds of threats. And then when Dr. King was assassinated, the administration and I tried to open up the campus for folks who were pouring in

for the funeral. So, these fraternity boys with their gold winged Mercedes and Porches said, "What can we do?" And we said that everybody needed transportation. They are coming in by plane. Maybe you can meet people and get them to various accommodations. So, they went down to the church, SCLC, and were immediately made members of the Southern Church Leadership Conference. So they were wearing these big cardboard signs on their cars so they could get through because they said, "Atlanta is going to burn tonight." So, these kids did their traveling around and when they came back, their eyes were big and they said, "We were told to come home." One said he had picked up these four black men and when they asked where they wanted to go, they said, "Just drive, boys."

"So I just drove."

(41:38)

But they came back a changed group. And our group babysat the King family's kids during the funeral. We had a little old lady in Tennessee who had always been very active who went to go see Miss King who was in her bedroom and a call came and she said to put the phone on hold. Later on, she was very proud to say that she had put the president of the United States on hold for 17 minutes.

The other group that was very active was the Quakers. There were these nuns and ministers coming down and sometimes staying at the Quaker House. They were more involved, first in civil rights and then in the peace movement. And one of the wives of the Quaker ministers was a woman named **June Youngblood**. So, they were thought to be sources of communism and it turned out that they put one police officer out to shadow her. Of course, she knew it was happening and went to a fuel station and when he pulled up behind her, she went back and introduced herself. She said, "I am going to Quaker House now, if you want to know where I am going to be. And they came to be friends. At one point he said, "You can not march tomorrow in the Hiroshima Day parade because we know there is going to be violence." And she said, "I have really got to go." So, he marched with her! And there was no violence. But they were leading lights. **Phil Barker** came through and we had an underground mass at the Quaker House. I did not march, but I would take my convertible to the end of the march and drive people back to the Quaker House. It was heady days. We just did not know it was going to be such a powerful movement. I have forgotten what you asked me.

AR: I asked about the transition away from Emory, but this is much more interesting!

BS: Oh, oh right. So, Emory was pretty conservative and was in a budget crunch, probably as bad as we all are now. There were no faculty raises and things were just not moving. So, I took my sabbatical in Hawaii and the only continuing education I did was scuba diving. But after that, I felt that I could live in other places – maybe even live outside of the South. So, I came back and a few of us tried to get job offers. Not that I wanted to leave Emory, but we wanted to improve our salary and that was the only way I could do it. So, an old friend from graduate school came by, **Norm Watt**, to try and get the black universities to apply for more grants and then he came to Emory, as well. So, I walked down with a graduate student and he stood up and said, "Remember me?" So, it was a big reunion and I drove him back to the airport and told him I was looking around. He said, "We have a list of schools we give out to our students. I'll send it to you if you are interested in knowing what opportunities there are." He said there was a position open at his school, but it was clear he did not think I was ready for it. But he said to

send him my CV. So, I sent him my CV and he wrote back and said, “We have a faculty position.” I interviewed, but I was very laid back because I knew that they had already given the job to someone else, but I had already traveled there. It ends up that the other person didn’t take the job and so they invited me to come up. We ended up negotiating and all of a sudden I was a full professor and my salary went way up. We had five research assistants and a bunch of graduate students and it was all in a period of great growth. When I did join the faculty at U Mass, we had four women come into psychology that year. This was in 1973 or 74 and I went through the student union and there was the communist league, the socialist league, and marijuana everywhere. There was something that was amazing, just amazing. People didn’t dress up like we did at Emory. People wore jeans. It was a very different world; a first generation college or university. I began to feel much more at home and really enjoyed working with first generation college folk who were coming out of working class backgrounds. A few years back, students had taken over some building and I was walking with someone from women’s studies. There were a couple hundred people at the takeover and she looked around and said, “That’s what I love about U Mass.” You know, we had one of the first women’s studies departments in the country. I think I taught one of the first lesbian psychology courses ever.

AR: When was that?

BS: Probably the early 90’s. I was in a van going to a meeting in eastern Massachusetts. I was with the department chair and they had just done this search of course offerings to see what we weren’t offering that we should. So, they said, “Bonnie, would you be interested in Health Psychology?” I said “No, but I could do lesbian psych.” At which point they got really excited. It was that kind of department, that kind of university; very forward thinking. So, they went back, put a proposal together, took it to the senate, and made it a general education requirement. I mean, one of the number of required courses and you could take some of them.

AR: How did the students react?

BS: They were wonderful. The first course I taught, there were like 25 of them, or 30. There were a lot of men and what they did was some small group decided to do a gay awareness day. They had what they thought of as feminist music and gay music and had a big rally on the steps. There was a lot of stuff in the newspaper about it and that was all student run. Then I started teaching 90 students. I remember going in and these tall black men came into the class and one of the TAs said, “That’s the men’s basketball team!” Well, my name was up in the athletic office and I hope it wasn’t because I was an easy grader, but because I was teaching psych of women and I would let the women out for their softball games and did not penalize them for being away. So, they knew it was a course they could take. So, the boys all signed up for a course called, “The Lesbian Experience” or “Psychology of Individual Difference: The Lesbian Experience.” I don’t know if they knew what they were getting into, but they quickly realized that they were not lesbians, but that they shared some of the same oppression and discrimination.

(50:00)

So, these kids they had to read some novel and they had chosen, *The Color Purple*, and one of them, **Moony Mike**, came up to me after class and said, “I couldn’t believe that. I called my Mama and we talked for an hour and a half on the phone and she cried and I cried.” So, they were also supposed to see films, but these guys didn’t get around to it so the tutor brought some

in and we called it the first gay and lesbian film fest in the athletic department. And since they had these films these men would get all interested in it and as soon as they saw someone was going to be harassed they would be like, “No! No! You can’t do that!” Anyway, I think they went out converted supporters of the lesbian community! But those were heady times, too, just in the university. I know those things went on all the time, but again it was that business of not realizing what a difference it was making for people.

AR: I am going to switch gears. I am going to ask you about your trajectory to the APA presidency. What was that like for you? You were one of the first female presidents. I don’t know if you were an out lesbian at the time or not.

BS: I went to a meeting of division 35 or 44, I was introduced as the president-elect, and I said something about thanking them for their support. I got a standing ovation and this graduate student walked by and said, “I don’t know how you do it. It is okay for you to be out sometimes and then sometimes you are not.” Not that I wasn’t out, but some people didn’t know. So, a lot of people knew and a lot of people didn’t. And people didn’t make a big thing of it. There were lots of affirmative action and equal opportunity activities and in Division 12, Logan Wright was my mentor and he was an Indian and we both went to small colleges. He went to a small religious college in Oklahoma. We both had single moms. He would talk about being a “half-breed” that didn’t fit in. But he and another group who called themselves The Dirty Dozen had opted to try and get professional psychology into the governance because basically the scientist folks had run everything for years. But Logan had taken me under his wing and he had been president. George Albee had been involved, wonderful, wonderful man. They had just been really supportive.

(55:19)

I have always felt lucky because they were looking for women and wanting to be seen as uplifting and progressive. So, Logan ran for president and, somehow, I was invited to run and was nominated. Logan didn’t get it and I remember he called and he said, “I am over this, you run next year.” I had kind of run as a stalking horse. So I said to Logan, “Think about it.” And he did and he ran. That was the first time I ran as a stalking horse for him, he lost once, and then he won. It turns out I had a strong showing after him and the people running against me were not that well known. So, I swept in the next year and I had been on council and the board of directors. The first phone call was from **Steve Moran** in California and he said, “Bonnie, you are getting picketed out here by the psychology department because you have come in on the weakest brief for the Moonies”. What we had done, we didn’t know it was the Moonies, but there was some sort of lawsuit about proselytizing and we had come in and came up on the fact that you could, it was presented to us as a freedom movement, vote for it. We entered this lawsuit and I remember that each of us on the board of directors got sued. I think I got sued for 250,000 dollars. And then RICO, which is the regulations of organized crime. Anyway, I remember the officer who came to me and said, “I can deliver this warrant or you can come by and pick it up.” I picked it up, looked at it and said, “I don’t have 250,000 dollars.” But that was the last of it... the APA sort of general activities.

I was president and Logan had worked so hard on reorganization. We had 20 years of blue ribbon commissions and task forces. We were moving towards a federation and that was what the new organization would be. Council approved the reorganization, but the practitioners had finally gotten some clout and didn’t want to move towards the federation, so it was voted down

pretty heavily. I recall that Fowler was the president after me and I remember he said, “There are three things that I want you to do and to clean up before I am president: reorganization,” which we didn’t get to do, “selling the building, putting together a new building, and selling *Psychology Today*.” We did do those last two. We let the buildings go because we needed a new site and then we got that building in Washington. Selling *Psychology Today* got us out of an enormous monetary crunch. And then reorganization was such a failure.

AR: I am sure Wade [Pickren] has talked to you about *Psychology Today*, that was a huge issue for you to deal with.

BS: Yeah, and we were just hemorrhaging money at that point. I had been voted on council for the magazine and then, by the time I was president-elect, there was a small group of advisors and one of the big things was whether we would take alcohol and tobacco advertising. And we did because we would have been bankrupt without it, but that caused a lot of concern. We tried everything. What we did best was real estate. We shouldn’t have been in the magazine publishing business.

AR: Let me switch gears again and ask some reflection questions. Given that you have been in this business for 40 plus years...

BS: Since 1960. I joined the APA in 1963, which was the first year I was eligible. So 45 years.

AR: What are your impressions of what women have been able to do in psychology? And our real interest is in feminist psychology – where has it gotten us and, maybe, what hasn’t it been able to do?

(59:16)

BS: Well, it is incredible. When I think about having to wear skirts – we had restrictions on dorm times where the boys didn’t. Of course, I went to a girl’s college and we took the restrictions off everybody. There is just no comparison. I was very taken by Lynn’s speech this morning. I was thinking about when I was dean of women, all these women would come in pregnant and we were actually giving out birth control pills at the university health services, but no one knew it and it was a new phenomenon. I used to lend them money so they could go get an abortion. It’s just, I cannot even fathom the changes. And again now, women going into academic, going into practice, the fact that women are 70% of our doctoral graduates, it is beyond anything that any of us would have thought about or would have dreamed about 40 years ago.

AR: A different place.

BS: Very much, very much so. You know, I had a wonderful honor. I had never been to the National Multicultural Summit and this last year I was named an elder, so I made a few remarks. I tried to talk a bit about where I had come from and finally feeling at home again in the African American community, the Hispanic community, the gay and lesbian community, the Asian American, the groups that make up... And it does feel like, even though folks are in their separate organizations, that there is more mutual integration. Not as much as we want with the ethnic minority folk or even the gay and lesbian folk, but it is a whole different community. And I think what the marginalized community groups have brought is a sense of community to the

APA, their own communities. So it is not so much separate, it is not equal, but I don't feel as separate or distinct or as different as I did many years ago.

AR: Where do you think we need to still move forward?

BS: I think it is troublesome that the feminization of psychology is leading to lower salaries and I don't know about status. I think we are caught in one of those economic movements where the whole field of psychology is being depressed, if not oppressed. I was sort of open minded about prescription privileges, but also cautious because I was afraid we were giving up our behavioral approach for more of a money making service. From what I know and what I have learned, it is going to be a wonderful movement for us as psychologists and for mental health, but somehow we have to keep telling the stories of what psychologists are doing and what they could do.

(1:04:02)

AR: We haven't had you talk about your involvement with APS.

BS: That was a fascinating time of reorganization. Logan knew it was going to fail. The science committee was up in arms and we knew many of them were going to walk out. But **Steve Hay** and Janet Spence, through outreach, had this association for applied psychology, **AAAP**. They had about 1200 members who had gathered through reorganization. So, we met in New Orleans and I remember it distinctly. You know, those emotional times where memory is enhanced? I remember who was there and **Bill Hocker** coming in with a big banner that said, "American Psychological Society: Where Science Happens," or something. But basically, it was mostly Logan and Janet and others who decided we needed a place for the science folk to feel at home, so we thought about this society that would be put together for the science folk. Clinical folk were welcome, but the energy and focus were towards science. And we wrote the by-laws at my home, 45 minutes from Clark [University] where Hall and his group wrote up the by-laws for the American Psychological Association. This would be '87 or '88. And we were all prepared. We didn't know it had failed yet, but we had an alternative group set up so that folks could join.

So, the APA convention that year was in Atlanta and the hope was that this would be solid ground and we would all be together, but it wasn't meant to be. We had a staff, Logan, who was Indian, Kathy Grady – she says she is homosocial, but she is actually a straight white lady – and then we had **Candace**, I forget her last name, but Candace was a Hispanic woman who was not a psychologist, but involved in schools and politics and a friend of Kathy's. They printed up all of these APS stickers and we had applications. When you got off the plane in Atlanta there were APS stickers everywhere so folks had a sense that there was something brewing and we had the first meeting at the convention. Several hundred people gathered and we talked about the by-laws and the association. Another thing, we sent out the by-laws to **AAAP** and we didn't know how much it was going to be approved, but over ninety percent voted for the new association. So it began at the first convention. I went to the eight o'clock meeting and I didn't come up for air until five – just incredible; new advances in psychology. The convention had to be moved from one venue to another because it got so big. And our social hour poured out into the parking lot of the hotel. I dropped out of APA governance for a little while and got involved with APS and then APA really does the social advocacy and social justice outreach. APS is much more science, they are very different. They have a fellows committee and that's it. They don't have any committees or task forces. Though they do science outreach and lobbying, a lot of lobbying.

So, I went back to APA and I got elected to the board for the advancement of psychological issues of BAPP. And George Albee was also on the board (1:09:22)

AR: Tell me about your relationship with George.

BS: Well, I knew him back in the 1980s and I sort of followed him, but I didn't know him well until I was president. Well we were on BAPP together and then I was president of the general division of psychology [Division 1, Society for General Psychology], and he became president after me. So, he was still very much for revolution and against prescription privileges. And he was using the division as a puppet. Now, we didn't really have money to have big midwinter meetings so George and a couple of other folks came up to my house and there were four or five of us and we just sort of hit it off. [There was] a lot of reminiscing. I sort of stood back and watched him, so vigorous and energized at age 84. And then of course he was to give his presidential address and he passed away right before the convention. Nonetheless, we read his presidential address and he was very much missed and mourned. But he was just, interestingly at the [inaudible] Survival Center, the clients would sit around talking and there was this one guy who was a little paranoid and intellectual and homeless and it turns out he had George as a faculty member at the University of Vermont and he remembers him as the only professor whom he liked and who was open and down to earth. He just talked about how wonderful he was.

AR: Looking back on your own career there is so much you have intimately been involved with and organized, tons of research, clinical practice, teaching. When you look back at all of that, what are some of the things that stand out as things you are most proud of or mean the most to you?

BS: Well, I remember when **Herb Weaver** in college had said, "Maybe you should think about some other things" and I said, "Philosophy," and he said, "Think again." And I said, "English," and he said, "Come on, I know you are interested in psychology." As I recall, it may not have happened this way but I remember there were only five psychology majors and I said something like, "I don't know many psychologists, but they all seem a bit strange," and he said, "You will fit right in." When I applied, I thought I was applying just to general experimental psych, but he said, "No, you are going to apply for clinical." I wasn't even sure how spell it. But he said, you can do research, you can teach, and you can do clinical practice. And so I always felt very blessed that I have been able to spend my life reading, writing, and talking to people and they actually pay me to. I am retired, but I still get a nice pension. I can't think of anything else I would have rather done. I think, at some point, I would have wanted to be a marine biologist. That would have kept me outdoors a bit. And teaching I really love. I get excited about the youngins. It has been a broad, diverse... the key elements have been the personal relationships with faculty, students, students from all over. And this honor was for who I was, not what I had done, and that felt very affirming, very validating. But I don't think of myself as a pioneer, particularly. It seems to just be something I fell into along the way, never dreaming that I would see the remarkable social changes that would happen, never. And I came from a sort of despairing kid to someone who can marry her love in Massachusetts. And that has been a great gift in a long journey.

AR: I am going to open up the floor if anyone else has questions.

JM: I wanted to ask about this sense of difference. You talked a lot about feeling like you were different and given that today is a different world and you can integrate more of your personal and profession life, how has that sense of difference shifted?

BS: One of the big things is just being out as a lesbian and (laughs) I remember I had this lesbian literature in the living room and I had these guys, workmen coming through, and I turned the titles over so it wouldn't be a hassle. Now I probably wouldn't turn them over. I used to raise puppies and this carpenter who was a macho fellow bought one of the puppies and he kept coming back and coming back. He lived about 45 minutes away and he was hitting on my partner Margie. So he is this lovely man, he was just lovely, and finally he said something (1:16:36) and I said, "Kent, you must know that Margie and I are lesbians." And he said, "Oh, sure, sure, yeah, yeah, yeah, I knew that." And I said, "Most people you have met here are lesbian." And he said, "Oh, not that tall good-looking woman that looks like a model!" And I said, "Yup."

"Not that blonde that wears the bikini on the motorcycle."

I said, "yup." And so, he went through and was like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, I knew that." We still stayed friends and he did a lot of work for us. Certainly feeling more open and discovering that most folks know anyway and that they appreciate being brought into one's world. And meeting Marjorie. We have been together about 11 years. She was celebrating her divorce. She had been married 23 years and straight women have been differently socialized and she is wonderful. She has been such a joy in my life and has been such a joy, so accepting. Being lesbian herself now, that has been a big change for me. The first women I got involved with were all in the closet. We were never able to go out in public or be together in any public way. I think that sense of integration was capped at that national conference when I felt very included in a diverse and wonderful community of folks who have been different over the years.

JM: Do you think that has changed who you are as a psychologist?

BS: Yeah, I got into the university administration, so I wasn't active in research as I might have been otherwise. I was chair of a department and I enjoyed it and it was all public... I just enjoy being around folks, meeting new people. I forgot what you asked.

AR: ...if being open about who you are has changed you as a psychologist.

BS: Oh yeah, so as I was doing less research I was writing fewer papers. Then I started working in women and depression, not so much research, but reviews and trying to pull together theoretical models and treatment and then I started writing autobiographical chapters. There was something for models of achievement, then some folks wrote some other chapters, and then I was invited for a chapter for lesbians in academia or something. I forget what it was called. And I wrote this really long memoir and we cut a shorter one for the book. I showed Beverly Green this 27-page article and she read it on the train and she said she wanted to publish it for a book that she had. So all my writing over the last few years has not been creative writing per se, but autobiographical. I actually went to a writing seminar here (AWP) and it was quite fun. I have mostly been prompted by people who ask for chapters, but I have been wanting to put something else together. But I find what's really changed is that I don't do much research anymore, I am not a full faculty member but the teaching never changes. That's always great.

KS: I can imagine that you would be a wonderful mentor and so I am wondering what approach you have taken with mentorship and the role it takes in your life.

(1:21:46)

BS: I guess there are two or three different kinds of mentoring. Mentoring graduate students, you probably know [?], well she came with her master's to U Mass to work with me and I just got out of her way. And, Vickie Mays didn't work with me, but we kept in touch and she became one of the first black faculty members at UCLA. With the graduate students, it was more the research. It wasn't necessarily my research – well, a lot was my research program. When I got to be president of APA, there were still these notions that women weren't being included in leadership positions and so I invited every woman I knew to come hang out in the presidential suite I had. So professionally, I have tried to reach out to women and make sure they are included in boards and committees. Lately, it hasn't been the research as much as the personal relationships. I had this one class, a senior seminar where they had to write their honors project. And it was a class where you learned about yourself. And I learned about myself. We did it together and I think that's more, if I am doing any mentoring now, that's what it is. You know, *is there anything I can do to help you be who you want to be?*

KV: I would like to ask you about your leadership styles. You come in with a lot of roles to play. There are expectations that come with being a clinical psychologist, a research scientist, a lesbian, and a woman. How do you balance the expectations with your leadership roles you take on?

BS: That's a good question and I haven't thought about it, but I think it has to do with inviting other people. When I was department chair, I really cherished the other faculty and tried to let them know how important the work they were doing was and never denigrated anybody. There is something positive about everyone. Folks are doing the best they can. I think I have worked more behind the scenes, with Logan and APS. It wasn't behind the scenes when it came out, but trying to align myself with folks who are going in the same direction. I don't know if there is a leadership style there, but it is mostly trying to create a space where folks can step out and do what they want to do and then getting out of their way.

AR: Is there anything we haven't asked you that you would like to talk about?

BS: No, the only thing that created me is being southern – that sense of place, family. It is always hot in the south. It is just different. The differences I felt are as much about being southern as anything else. Just growing up with special prejudices and not others. I wrote an article about how I got so far away from home, from sin and salvation, hate and love, and how does one put these things together. I recall being with old friends in the south and singing civil rights songs and thinking how much I wish that we were all together, that we were really friends, my southern friends and ex-lovers, now Yankee friends. But that sense, that is where I feel the most torn. I think I would like to live back in the south, but I am not sure I could, but there is always that calling.

AR: That runs quite deep for you.

BS: Yeah.

AR: Thank you so much for your time.

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