

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Carla Willig

*Interviewed by Leeat Granek
Boston, MA
July 17, 2007*

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CW: Carla Willig, Interview participant

LG: Leeat Granek, Interviewer

LG: Let me start out by asking you some general questions about feminism and your career and then go into more specific questions and then wrap up with some broader questions, okay? You can feel free to add or expand on whatever. Or expand on anything I ask you about and if I don't ask about something that you feel I should know about feel free to add or expand on it. How and when did you first develop a feminist identity?

CW: As I said when we e-mailed about this, I don't really have a feminist identity in the sense that I would understand it and it raises a lot of questions about what that means. I think it has something to do with when one gets involved in these things. I think there was a time in the 60s or 70s where what I do and what I'm interested in and how I approach my work and my life would have made me a feminist by definition. Whereas I think later in the 80s and 90s it changed because I think what it meant to be a feminist changed to some extent during that time. So I don't really have that as an identity. But having said that I don't really feel I have any particular identity. I wouldn't say I'm a critical psychologist or I am this. I feel like I have a certain approach to what I do - my work and my life both together - and that way of doing my work and my life does involve being critical of the taken-for-granted and mainstream way of doing things and that applies across the board. And one big part of that is gender. I think gender is one area of which I have been critical and challenging of the status quo, but it also applies to other areas that aren't gender because that's one area where a lot of things are taken for granted and that have political consequences, personal consequences.

So I think gender is one area where I have been critical and challenging of the status quo but it also applies to other areas which aren't just about gender, so I guess my feminist identity is part of a bigger, left-wing political identity, is what I'm trying to say. And when that happened is actually very difficult to answer. I remember that when I was a student - there was a time when I was an undergraduate student, in my early twenties when I was in my early twenties, this must be 1983, 1984 - when I first started studying psychology, I did join a women's group. But the funny thing is I don't really have any recollection of being a feminist and thinking of myself in that way, and then thinking I must join a women's group. I just joined a women's group at the university because it seemed to be a place where I could explore some of these questions I had. {3:17} So in a way now looking back, that probably makes me, gives me a feminist identity, because

otherwise why would I have done that? And the group I joined was at Manchester University in the U.K. [United Kingdom] and this women's group had quite a strong history it was quite well known in the country, it had been around for some time and they set up things up like reclaim the night marches and transport for women. So I would go out on my own, looking back on that now I'm thinking, my god! I went out on my own to the university student union disco - I liked the Reggae nights on Tuesday - And I would go on my own, but the reason I could go on my own was because I knew the women's mini-bus would go back home at midnight or two o'clock or whenever and actually drop me off outside my house and wait until I was inside. This happened every night and this was all set up by this group, so that actually was a very important part of my university life, that it was there. So that's when I started to sort of relate to that space.

LG: Do you remember the name of the women's group?

CW: It was just the Student Union Women's Group, in the University, and it had been there for some years when I joined it - LG: Sounds great - CW: Yes it was very big, about 30 people every week coming to talk about issues around how to deal with sexist behavior, the body, safety, about politics.

LG: And were you involved in any other kinds of activities? Feminist activities?

CW: Well, funnily enough, not really because I joined that group and then two years later I joined the Socialist Workers Party which is not a feminist organization, and in fact there was a bit of a tension between the feminist groups and the Socialist Workers Party because they put class above gender as a category of oppression and they saw gender oppression as a side effect of capitalism. Rather than looking at patriarchy as a separate system - and I was in that organization, I was in that for ten years so - my political life if you like, was shaped more by that than by being a feminist. But having said that, of course all the causes that came up in society about defending abortion rights etc, the Socialist Workers Party would always take the side of the feminist cause, even though they had a different analysis of why we were oppressed, different from a patriarchic theory. So it got very theoretical, but anyway in terms of political identity, I think I would have always said I'm a socialist rather than I'm a feminist, but to me being a socialist also meant being an anti-racist and being a feminist as well, but they all belong together.

LG: Have you always been so involved in politics? Was it something that in university, in your undergraduate, suddenly clicked or was it something you grew up with?

CW: No I mean I didn't [grow up with it] it was all through university, really. When I was a teenager I wasn't really interested in politics, I was more of a sort of hippie type. I was interested in smoking joints and listening to music and you know more about rejecting society altogether and wanting to just do my own thing and my parents aren't left-wing at all. So not at all. Then it was all to do with university I think. There was a student occupation that I was involved in, of the university, we occupied the

administration building. It was very exciting - for a whole week, and that really radicalized me as well, so I was very involved in that.

LG: You had a one-week sit-in of the administration building?

CW: We slept there and everything. And then the bailiffs came into it and there were all the fires and everything, and then these guys came in and smashed down the door, it was quite frightening, and they came in and chased us out and the people that didn't leave would be arrested, but I just left. So it was quite a big experience in terms of realizing that if you do break the rules or if you do something that doesn't fit they will take quite drastic action, the law will come down on you and shuck you out {08:01}. So that was during my undergraduate degree.

LG: And then what attracted you to psychology and how did you combine this critical political perspective with your work?

CW: I didn't start psychology with any political thoughts in mind. To be honest, I chose psychology because it was one possibility. I actually applied for six different courses and they included: theatre studies, Spanish, psychology, philosophy, all different things that I found interesting. I just wanted to be at university in Manchester because I had gone there for language, to learn English, and I really liked it. So I thought: How could I stay here? And I thought, if I apply to university what can I do? Anything that's not too scientific I thought, so I put down philosophy, Spanish, theatre, and psychology. Psychology was the only course that offered me a place and so I took it. I had a very little idea of why I was doing it or what it would be about. I just got into it as I learned about it. I never really thought of it in a political way until much later, actually, until I did a master's. So really during the undergraduate degree I was very unquestioning of mainstream psychology. I didn't really think about, I mean this was in the early 1980s, we didn't have any qualitative training or anything. It was very mainstream. Then I did a master's in criminology and that was a big turning point intellectually. We had a qualitative methods class, which was taught by a woman called Maureen Cain {10:01}, who was fantastic, very inspiring. She was a feminist and she was teaching us about things I'd never thought about, epistemology and about all the things that I now teach. She was doing all of that and it was so powerful. And we also had some classes looking at construction of crime, this was taught by a Marxist who was looking at crime as a product of capitalism. I had never thought about these things. I thought that crime was like an object, something is a crime and that's it. He was looking at crime in the third-world and what do we call a crime and how do statistics get compiled and it really gave me a social constructionist understanding. This one-year course was probably the most important year in terms of my learning. It changed my whole way of thinking {10:58}.

LG: It's interesting because as an undergraduate you said you were involved in the Socialist Party and then the scholarly work was separated from that

CW: Yes. Completely separated. I didn't collect it up at all, not until that master's year, which I enjoyed very much. And then after that, politics and studying - they were

connected because I realized how knowledge is constructed and how interests play a role in what you find and how you present finding[s]. All of that was just there, once it's there you can't close your eyes again to it, so then after that it was always there.

LG: And then you did your doctorate in psychology?

CW: Then I did my PhD, it was social psychology, so it was a little bit on the boundary between psychology and social sciences, because I was actually in the Department of Social and Political Sciences at Cambridge. They have a separate department for psychology, completely separate. Social psychology is within the social and political sciences school, where you have the rest of the topics that are not in psychology - sociology, cultural studies, that sort of thing. Then the other department is in a different place, about 15 minutes' walk, a different building, and it's the Department of Experimental Psychology, where it's all very mainstream. They did all their animal experiments and so on, they had labs. And these two never met, they never connected. I spent five years in Cambridge and I never set foot inside the Department of Experimental Psychology, not once.

LG: And that was your discipline, officially?

CW: Yes. Psychology, indeed. But I was always in S and some other department and I went to seminars there, and it was very inter-disciplinary. We had Pierre Bourdieu{ 12:57} come and talk, and very well known social scientists, and I went to that, so I completely left psychology as a sort of discipline and I was in S. And my friends were doing PhDs in Sociology, looking at race and things like that. So I was not in psychology, really, even though on paper I was a psychologist.

LG: So how then did you choose your dissertation topic on HIV and AIDS. Why did you choose that topic? And how did you move into the other research areas?

CW: I chose the topic because when I finished the criminology [program] I was very happy in Cambridge and I wanted to stay, and also I wanted to do more studying, and so I thought I would do a PhD. The topic came up because it was 1986 by then, 86/87, and the whole AIDS situation really just became very prominent in the U.K. There were these big advert campaigns, maybe in 85/86, showing very frightening images showing gravestones and a voiceover saying, "You know the facts, the choice is yours" and all of this. So it was very prominent and I had two friends, my best friends, who were studying something else entirely and they both began to be very, very anxious about HIV. Even though they hadn't really engaged in any particular behaviour that would have put them at risk. I suppose it was possible that they would have been infected, but it was extremely unlikely. But they were really anxious about it, I wasn't. And this made me wonder why is it that some people are just so emotionally engaged with this and others are not when objectively this is the same risk for all us, not very much at risk at that time. There were not very many people [with HIV], it was just beginning. I just got very interested in these questions. Interestingly it was a very psychological question, which is exactly the same kind of question that we are still asking today here at this conference:

Why is it that some people respond one way or another to health threats, to campaigns, to risk? It was that sort of question. But because I was in the Socialist Workers Party at the time, I also felt that I wanted to bring in the question of class. And so I thought: What am I going to do? I am going to ask the question “Are there differences in the way in which middle-class individuals and working-class individuals construct meaning around HIV and how they feel about it?” My hypothesis was that there is something about control in there. That people that have very little control in their real lives, such as people who were more deprived perhaps or at working-class jobs, would feel less in control of their own safety, in terms of HIV and AIDS. I sort of expected there to be a difference between the two groups, in terms of agency and the sense of how and to what extent we can protect ourselves. Interestingly, going back to the feminism question, I had no expectations about gender differences, I didn’t even think about gender differences, I really didn’t. My proposal was all about class, and then I recruited my participants, they were 50/50 working-class and middle-class, but also 50% women and 50% men. I interviewed them about HIV and many other things, long interviews. I analyzed the data using grounded theory, line-by-line. I did it very diligently with no expectations even though in the back of my mind I had the class thing. And you know what happened? The only actual difference that came out of the analysis was gender. I wasn’t really looking for it at all, so that in fact convinced me of the use of grounded theory. Because I said here I am looking for class and finding gender so it’s definitely not me that has brought this to the data. This is emerging. {17:20}

LG: Yes

CW: I didn’t want this, I wanted something else. It was amazing. It was gender, the only difference was that, I mean there are many interesting things, but I’m talking about in terms of difference, was that women tended to talk about, they could tolerate contradiction. The women would say, “I know I should use condoms, I know I should ask my partner to use condoms, I know this is really risky, *but* when it happens I feel so emotional, I feel this desire or this need for a connection so I don’t do it. They were happy to sit there, well not happy, but they could sit there and say it’s a contradiction. Men never did this. They would say either I know that I should use a condom and therefore I do, or they would say I don’t use a condom and then convince themselves that they didn’t need to. So they had to have no dissonance. They didn’t acknowledge that maybe you do one thing but you know you should do another thing. It had to be coherent and consistent and that was very strange, very interesting. That was really the main finding in terms of any differences. So I was quite struck by that. It also shows and reminds me that at that time I certainly wasn’t thinking as a feminist, because if I had I would have been expecting gender differences.

LG: So how did then, you mentioned that that is what convinced you of grounded theory so is that what started you off in other areas of qualitative research methods?

CW: Doing qualitative research was very important to me ever since I had the lectures by Maureen Cain. I was interested in the whole idea of the epistemology and all the thinking behind that and I just used grounded theory because I knew about it and I

thought it sounded interesting. There was also a woman called Molly Andrews at Cambridge at the time, she was a couple of years ahead of me, and she was very helpful. I met her a few times just for chats and she was very good and very clear about qualitative approaches and she gave me some pointers as well and directions. I was very interested in the whole idea of using qualitative interviewing, letting people tell their stories, etc. But I wasn't particularly attached to grounded theory as such. Then when I finished the PhD, I then came across discourse analysis but it was too late to use it in my PhD because this was the mid 80s, late 80s. So what I did was I reanalyzed my data after I finished the PhD, so I already had it, but I had all this data still. I then went back and reanalyzed it, not all of it but quite a lot of it, using discourse analysis. Then I came up with different insights, obviously, because it was a different method. I then published that. So that was my first sort of area of publication, it was all drawing on my original data but it was using a different method of analysis. Then I got very very heavy into discourse analysis. Discourse analysis was much more in tune with my political thinking, about constructing meaning, ideologies and how ways of talking can limit what we can do. It all fit in perfectly with false-consciousness and the Marxist view of how people can be trapped in ways of thinking about themselves and if they think differently they could challenge the conditions and rise up and have a revolution. It was actually very compatible and of course then gender came back into it because in analyzing the data it was very obvious that the discourses used were positioning women and men differently {21:35}. I also was then interested in how the discourses that are found were limiting what women could do in terms of requesting condom use from a partner, all of those issues came up, so I think gender came out much more. It came out of grounded theory in terms of difference, but politically speaking the discourse analysis was more able to foreground gender as something that has consequences in terms of what you can do in those sorts of situations. So I stayed with discourse analysis for a long time after that.

LG: So you mentioned a few things that keep coming up, gender, class, qualitative methods, health psychology. Can you think of any other themes in your work as you look back on your program of research that have emerged.

CW: I think really looking back there aren't so many different ones. I had a very long period of time where I was looking at discourse in relation to risk-taking and usually it was in terms of sexual behavior, even though I did some with students later on applying discourse to other risky behaviors like smoking or drug use or whatever. But my own work was still very much within HIV/AIDS and how people use discourse and what consequences that may have for what they do, and that was going on for a long time. So we're really talking about 1992 until early 2001, 2002. Until then I was doing that and all my writing and thinking and publishing was around issues within social-constructionist epistemology and the relationship between discourse and practice. I was trying to think through what's more important or where to intervene, what do you change first, what we say or what we do? So I've been busy for ten years. I: Very busy. C: But then it changed and I became interested in phenomenology and existential philosophy and using different methods, phenomenological methods of research. So that's really within the last few years and it's also new, I'm still kind of learning about that. It's been a big change recently.

LG: How did that shift happen?

CW: How did that happen? That's a good question. I think what happened was I felt even though what I was doing was very interesting and important, I thought it felt like it was becoming quite repetitive because it was applying the same framework to different things and I was asked to always do the same [thing]. I was asked to write a couple of chapters on Foucaultian discourse analysis and give a talk about it, it just felt like I was simply repeating. Not that there was anything wrong with it, I just felt that I had reached a saturation point with it. And I also lost my own sense of curiosity and excitement and I wasn't intrigued, I just sort of, it was more mechanical in the end. I thought I don't really like that and then at the same time I was beginning to be very interested in therapy and thinking how interesting it would be to work with people over a long period of time. I was very aware that doing [one] interview is really limiting. You know, because people would talk to me once, for maybe an hour or two, even though they were talking very much about intimate details, their sexual behaviour, sexuality. It was good data but I was very aware, to be honest, you can't really get a full understanding of somebody's experience and behavior in a one-off session. Also I was aware of this tension between me writing about change, I was always writing about change and about how discourses can change and how empowerment can take place. But none of the data that I collected gave me any sense of change because I only got a snapshot of a person at one point in time {26:00}. So I started to think, initially, about how to do research that was longitudinal really, and thought maybe to see people every week for a period of months and talk to them [about] how their behavior might change and see if they talked differently. But that's very hard to set up because you need to recruit people who happen to want to talk to you - and why should they - for a period of months about their lives. So I realized of course this is what therapists do. And I thought this would be very interesting. So initially when I trained as a counseling psychologist I did it for very selfish reasons really. I didn't do it to help people and make the world a better place, to make people sort out their problems. I was thinking more in terms of wanting to understand better what goes on for people and if that has a good effect on them as well that would be good, if I could help. But I didn't sort of see myself as "I'm gonna help people" I just saw it as I want to be there and witness this, their change and their experience.

LG: Was this existential counselling training?

CW: Yes. That's the training. I chose that because I was sort of half pragmatic and half following what I really wanted to do. Because I realized that if I wanted to teach this then I would have to do the counseling psychology as opposed to the therapy training because at the university where I teach the program is accredited by the British Psychological Society and to teach in that program you have to be chartered with them and to do that you have to do certain [things]. So I sort of went for that but I did it at a college that specializes in existential, phenomenological approaches. And again, it's not the mainstream. I was choosing a slightly unusual path and it's sort of accepted, but it's

seen as quite fringed within counseling psychology. But it's accredited, so I felt just about okay doing it.

LG: What is it? What is existential counseling because I have no idea?

CW: It is a certain approach to therapy and so you can call it counseling or therapy but the people who are using existential approaches they wouldn't differentiate. So it's only called counseling for the purpose of accreditation and formal kind of structures, but in practice it's the same as existential therapy, so they're all in one category. And essentially it's a way of working that tries to work with people by making them think through and be more aware of the way in which they approach life. So it's very compatible with social constructionism because it's looking at not so much what determines how we are now in terms of childhood experiences, it's looking more at how we create meaning and make sense of things as a result of our learned ways of understanding the world and ourselves. And then focusing on how that limits us, in terms of how we can be, so this idea of sedimentation, that we are kind of constructing a sense of self and that becomes a straight jacket to which we can be trapped. So it's very social-constructionist in that sense but it's also existential because it's taking the view that there are certain areas in life, such as our mortality, which can't be avoided. They are there even if we don't think about them, they will have to be negotiated in some way. So there is an assumption theoretically that there are certain issues and they are quite specific about what they are: mortality, relating to other people, and being in a body. So those are sort of the basic features of being human which one way or another will have to be managed and they are managed very differently in different cultures and by different people, but we can't just not engage with them. Even if we think we are not engaging with them, for example if we are a hermit and we don't see any other people, that's also a way of relating to people, by excluding them. So the idea is that when you are working existentially you help someone to become more aware of how we negotiate these areas of being human and what are the consequences of doing it that way for how we live life and how does that limit what we can do {30:29}. How does it foreground certain aspects and how does it put in the background others. And the aim isn't necessarily to change. So the aim isn't that we think we know how it would be better or healthier and then help them to get there. It's more saying "Okay, help someone to become aware and then maybe make a decision." Maybe half the clients might decide I want to stay that way, but knowing then that this is the way I choose to live my life and this is what I make of life and accept it.

LG: So are you using that now in your research?

CW: Yes. Well this is actually a bit of a challenge at the moment, I'm sort of right in the middle of struggling with this and basically yes, ideally what I would like to do is work with the client material as my data as well as working with them, to help them to work out how to live as well. But of course, there are ethical issues which weren't there before with my more straightforward research, so that is the problem I have now, and I haven't solved this problem at all, I am right in the middle of it. I have a lot of material, I've written something using this existential framework and I've used client material but I

haven't published it yet because I am just not sure yet how to approach the ethical challenge, whether to show what I've written to the clients and get their input, whether to simply tell them about it, whether to anonymize it so much that it's okay not to ask them, you know how to do it. And I am a bit stuck, I've been stuck for about a year without deciding. So I'm sitting on research basically and I haven't decided how to approach this because there are consequences. I've also started to write using myself as a subject, if you like, and that's easier because as long as I'm happy it's okay. So I can do that but I would also like to, of course, draw on the client material. I need to think about what's the best way to go about it.

LG: I can give you some suggestions afterwards. You've had a prolific career in publishing books and articles, I was looking through your C.V. So I have two questions: Which one do you think has had the most impact and why? And which do you like the most or are you most proud of and are they the same or more important?

CW: That's a very good question. Interestingly, I think the ones that have the most impact and the ones that I like most are the same, I'm sure that applies to many people. I think that one thing I would say is that there is quite a difference between some of the publications in terms of what they are. Some of them are teaching tools, they are ways of helping other people understand more clearly what has been written about already so that's not me giving new ideas but it's just putting things together in a way that makes it easier for other people to access these ideas, and I think I'm good at that. It seems I'm good at doing that and I think from what people have said to me, it's because apparently I make things simple, which could sound like an insult but I don't think they mean it like that. But I think what they mean is that I sort of manage to communicate ideas that are quite complex but in such a way that they are not confusing anymore and I think I've done that in the textbook about qualitative research and some articles about discourse analysis {34:26}. And that's why they get quoted a lot because it's a bridge for people into something and I don't tend to write in an obscure way, I try to make it very clear. {34:39} So that's one thing I do, but I think that's different from when I write something which I think is actually getting something new out and developing my own understandings or interpretations, which is a bit different and there are fewer things like that. I think I've done less of that than the other and they don't tend to get so much attention, for obvious reasons really. There's one book chapter which I like, it's my favorite publication I would say so far, until now that I'm doing this new stuff and that was quite a philosophical, epistemological chapter on critical realism in a Crombie and Nightingale book. {35:30} and that gets cited sometimes and when it does I feel it's something quite original rather than explaining someone else's work in a clear way, so that's different. I also think the things I'm looking at now are more of the second type, this client work and writing about my own experiences in a phenomenological way. But that's still, as I said, I'm still trying to work out how best to publish that in an ethical way, so hopefully I will find a solution to that, soon, and not sit on it for ten years, to actually progress with it.

LG: Your C.V. mentions that you sit on several editorial boards for academic journals, can you tell about what those experiences are like for you, what journal you enjoy working on most, why? If there is anything outstanding about those experiences?

CW: I think that's just about reviewing papers in a way. I've just reviewed papers and then over the years you eventually get asked to join the board and maybe you get more papers but it's not really been a big part of what I do. I do enjoy reviewing papers, I enjoy it because it allows me to also think through methodological issues myself and see how other people's papers - I tend to review methodological papers mostly. And so it's been enjoyable but I don't really feel that it's a great burden, I don't spend that much time on it. But yes I've enjoyed doing that. I haven't done anything such as put together a special issue, I might do that in the future.

LG: Do you have a teaching philosophy?

CW: Not really. Well, I (laughs) - you mean how to approach teaching. Well yes, I probably do implicitly because I just draw on what I think was useful to me when I was a student and to me what wasn't particularly useful or attractive was audio-visual aids or to get power-points perfectly structured, which people tend to be preoccupied with nowadays. But what I've always liked is if I feel a lecturer is actually thinking through issues as they talk, as though they still care and they are really moving from one place to another and you are walking alongside following their train of thought. And I feel when I give a lecture or teach in a seminar, or whatever, that it's a good session when I do that and it's not a good session when I simply go through things that to me don't matter anymore and I've worked out some time ago, and I'm simply telling the students about that. I can see the difference. And that's also another reason why I changed, in terms of the counseling training, because I felt it was very much the case in my teaching that even though I was doing a good job, it was lacking, something was lacking, because I wasn't actually exploring new paths. I wasn't thinking things through, I was simply telling students things I thought three years ago and I don't think it's a good way of teaching. Whereas now I'm going to be teaching counseling psychology more and there I'm still learning myself, I'm still discovering and I'm still excited and I think the teaching will be better because of that {39:16}. So yes, my teaching philosophy is that the teacher has to be still learning, still excited about the topic and when that's gone I think it's important to change and maybe teach something new.

LG: Do you have any mentors? Did you have any mentors?

CW: Yeah, I think I certainly did have mentors in the early times as an undergraduate. I had one lecturer who was very much looking after me and taking an interest. Interestingly, he was very much into psychoanalysis. I: What's his name? C: John Churcher {39:51} was his name. He was at Manchester. He was very interested in psychoanalysis and I remember at that time, in the third year, we could choose special subjects, modules to choose, and I chose psychoanalysis with John Churcher {40:12} and there were only three people in the group and this was a course of eighty students, because people just weren't interested in psychoanalysis. Some people thought it was a

joke. At that time it was really frowned upon, less than now, even, in psychology. But these were the most fantastic sessions, we had a small group, we were reading each week and this guy John Churcher was so enthusiastic. At that time he was training also as a psychoanalyst. And so it was just that sort of teaching actually that I just mentioned, it was like that. And he was a mentor, I went to his house and he was very nice, he was very disillusioned with me I think when I started to become a Marxist because I became much more black-and-white, less open to looking at paradoxes and tensions. So for that period of time I was much more black-and-white, even though there was a point to it but I think it is tempting to lose that a little bit, and I think he didn't like that {41:14}. So we lost touch during that time, but he's definitely a very important influence on me and later I don't think I was the same anymore. I didn't really have a mentor after that. I'm trying to think. Not really after that. And this Maureen Cain{41:34} as a lecturer, she was very inspiring as a role model, actually she was very inspiring, during that master's course, but we didn't have a very close personal relationship, I just had her as a role model for how you could be as an academic.

LG: What was it about her?

CW: Again, her lectures were really her thinking things through. It was just fantastic to sit there and have her think things through and watch it and follow her. And she was very calm and she was very conversational; she wasn't performative, she wasn't standing there with props and everything prepared. She'd just walk in and she would take an issue or a question, or epistemology and she would sort of work her way around it, question it. She was also quite, what would I say, not a sense of humour, it sounds a bit different from what I mean. She was amused sometimes by herself it was almost like, she had a lot of humility and she would sort of smile and say "Yes, but on the other hand, and having said that..."{42:46}. So it was real, a little meandering around the issues but always getting somewhere new and I thought, to me this seemed to be a very nice and inspiring way to teach, which I always preferred to this sort of standing up and being very loud and sort of having all the answers and this is it. So she's in a way, still a role model in how to be a teacher as well as how to be honest about your own questions. I do try to do that when I teach, I do try to say to the students "This is where I've got to and I'm not sure about this one, I'm still working on this one." So they know it's a journey, you never get to the end.

LG: What would you like to see happen in the field of psychology, in terms of the research that you do or that you have done in the past, I know you've switched in the last few years, but is there anything in particular that you'd like to see developing, happening?

CW: Yes, actually, there is. I think what I would like to see happening is more courage to interpret. This is my thing at the moment, this is something that I'm really quite interested in right now, partly because I know that I spent a lot of time not having the courage to interpret. I thought, "I have to be so careful." I: What do you mean by that? C: What I mean is that there is a tendency, partly out of political modulations, to avoid imposing any meaning on the participants, to be respectful to what they have said, to stick with what they have said, and that's a good thing because there is a long history of

psychology abusing participants by imposing meanings or distorting what they have said and sorting them into categories, pathologizing them. So to avoid all of that I think critical psychologists have sort of, and feminists as well in the seventies, have said “Well we want to give people voices and listen to what they have said and not add too much ourselves and just give them the space to speak.” And so then a lot of analyses I think have become a purely systematic summary of what people have said, maybe in terms of themes or something, so that it wasn’t really an analysis or an interpretation, it was more of a capturing and presentation of what people said. And politically {45: 16} that can be very important, but now I feel that we’ve gone too far in that direction and we’ve sort of shied away from going beyond what people have said and talk about what might have motivated them, underlying dynamics, theoretical constructs, that can explain why someone would say that. So rather than just saying, “This is what they have said” I want to encourage people to think about where that might come from, and interpret that, suggest and draw theories, we have a lot of theories to choose from. And that’s what I mean by courage, to have the courage to go beyond what is there and talk about where it might come from, but always of course with the awareness that you can be wrong and that you can interpret in a way that might disempower the participants or impose meaning on what they have said, which is not a good thing. But this is what I would like to see, a little bit more interpretation, and again this is where I am going myself. I want to do more of that myself. Because I think I have been very careful, conservative in a way, with my analysis. Not so much in discourse analysis because that is different, discourse analysis interprets in a certain kind of way by definition. But I think phenomenological research, a lot of it is simply a description of what people have said, and I want to go beyond and have a more hermeneutic approach to interpret and throw up ideas that go beyond what’s been said.

LG: That’s been coming up in this conference a few times. Now just to wrap up the questions, I’m going to ask you some questions about feminism and career together. What kind of barriers, obstacles, discrimination, if any, have you experienced because of being a woman or being a critical psychologist or a feminist, I know you don’t identify as a feminist psychologist but having that kind of critical {47:19} perspective within the field.

CW: Well, I think there is only one way in which it has been detrimental, I think in terms of how I’ve been treated in terms of face-to-face encounters or the way in which a head of department is treating me, it’s always been very positive and respectful. So I have not had any sense of being put down or treated differently because of what I do and who I am, but I think it has had an effect in terms of promotion and how quickly you move up, I suppose. Because partly simply because of the way in which we publish and how also in the U.K. publications are valued according to the type of journal that you publish in and those journals that get high credits, if you like, or a lot brownie points, they are more scientifically oriented ones. And the ones that are more critical, more philosophical, they are seen as less important, they are read by fewer people and they have a lower citation index. So therefore, the C.V., even if there are a lot of publications, doesn’t have the same weight as if I publish the same number of papers in journals that are more “scientific.” So that sets me back. Also, not getting any funding for research is another

one, and of course the type of research I do is not of interest to the Department of Defense -we were just talking in the session about that. Or the companies that want to make profits, you know, I haven't got anything to sell to anybody and so it's less easy to get funding. Also I'm interested more in depth analysis of what some people have said and to get insight into that. There's not really anyone who would want to fund that so I don't have that kind of big money on a C.V., which again helps you to get promoted more quickly. So I think, being a critical psychologist, working qualitatively does set you back {49:27} or hold you back a bit because of the ways of the system, the way the system works. Not necessarily because any individuals are hostile to you, but just because of the ways these things are calculated and that's definitely had an effect, I think on my progression at work. I think those are really the main [points], and maybe also something about personal style as well, actually, because I think my approach is quite egalitarian and I like to work with students in a way that is more like colleagues. I don't tend to be authoritarian in any way or try and remind anyone of my status. I tend to do the opposite really, because I am more comfortable with it, but it's also I think a gender thing and it's to do with a critical, egalitarian point of view. And so people obviously see you as you present yourself and so I think students and colleagues sometimes assume that I am more junior than I really am, because I don't portray myself in that sort of way. I'm more comfortable with that. In fact, I remember one story which is a bit illustrative of this. When I first started lecturing, my first job [was] at Plymouth, University of Plymouth, I was a lecturer, I had a job- I had signed my contract, I was a lecturer in psychology even though at the lowest level when I started. And I was given this tiny office, which was not a proper office, not because of it being me but because I was the latest member of the staff and they hadn't really sorted out the office problem, but it did look different. So I was sitting in that office and one day in my early years, it was at the beginning, first few weeks of my job, a student came in to see me, one of my tutees and we were talking about her work and then at the end she said "So you want to be a lecturer" And I was really taken aback, because I assumed throughout our conversation she was aware that I was her lecturer, she was a tutee and even though I was her age almost (because I was 27 when I finished my PhD), she was probably 22 or something, and I was dressed more casual, I wasn't wearing a suit, and I related to her as an equal, even though I was more knowledgeable about psychology. But perhaps because I presented myself in that way she couldn't see me as a lecturer even though {52:08} objectively I was. So it was quite strange to hear her say "So do you want to be a lecturer then?" And I was like, "I think I am." And then she apologized and was quite thrown and that did make me realize that there is still this issue about, you know the gender issue, and age I think it is that somehow if you are a certain way, if you are a certain age, gender, dressed a certain way, you just might not be seen as a lecturer, it has to be a certain type of person, you know, with the beard and corduroy jacket and patches. This is the tradition, clutching books. This is a lecturer, and if you are not like that you can't be a lecturer.

So that was quite interesting, and even though now it's different because I am much older and people do know I'm a lecturer, I think there still might be a little bit of an effect like that. That maybe I present myself as less weighty, in terms of the academic thing, than I could if I wanted to. But, I don't think - that doesn't impact negatively on my quality of

life at work. In fact, it's probably positive, but it may have an impact, it might slow down my promotion trajectory. Which is going well but I'm not rushing it, I'm not striving, striving, striving, I just sort of do things when they come up or when I feel I'm ready but maybe that slows me down a bit, I don't know.

LG: That's really interesting. How have you balanced the demands of your personal life and your professional life?

CW: That's a good question because for a long time I wasn't really aware of any conflict at all, but that's because I think I spent a lot of time in my personal life doing work-related things, that I just didn't even realize it. And now it's changed a bit, I think partly through doing the therapy training and having therapy myself. Of course I have had to have personal therapy for the last four years, so that's had an impact {54:11}. And I've become a lot more protective of my personal space and time, or you might say more lazy. I appreciate much more just doing nothing or sitting around and relaxing and just being. Whereas before, I kind of felt it was normal if I had a few hours I would do some work, it was normal. Whereas now it doesn't. So now there's more conflict, interestingly. But I don't have children, I don't have any relatives to look after, they are all in Germany, so in a way it has made me very free to kind of come here. And I'm in a relationship but I don't have children to look after, so I don't feel there's a lot of tension, there would be probably if I had a family, children. But I don't have that, so I feel quite comfortable with that balance, it has never been a problem really.

LG: Okay. What advice would you give to a feminist woman or a critical psychologist working in psychology now?

CW: That's a good question. If they asked me for advice.... This is very interesting what just happened in my mind. I couldn't think about this without thinking like a counseling psychologist, so I thought: Okay, if someone came and asked me for advice what would I say, my first question would be, "I wonder why you ask me that?" And "What is it that you are looking for?" {55:44} "Why do you need advice?" "Are you not happy with what you do?" "Are there any areas where you are feeling uncomfortable?" I would need to know more. But that's coming from a therapy point of view.

I think what I would probably say, if anything, would be, don't get stuck in a niche, don't get sedimented in an identity. Be open all the time to new ideas, new positionings, move around and don't feel like because you've said things like this, or you've published something, that now that is where you have to be for the rest of your life. Don't become that, use ideas but don't become a set of ideas and always be flexible because otherwise things get very dull and very fixed and you lose the curiosity and the excitement and the interest. And even if it's tempting, because I've had that experience [where] others want you to be that segmented, because then you can be slotted in. You know you want someone to do a chapter on this, you ring them and you know here is the feminist, here we have this... {56:59} And they want you to be more like that but for the person themselves I think it's not good intellectually either and so we have to resist it actively. I would probably recommend to surprise, maybe to try and surprise people sometimes, so

they don't get this idea, so if they invite you to give a talk and they assume it's going to be about discourse analysis, turn up and talk about something completely different. Just to say actually I'm not just that. I would recommend that.

LG: That's great advice. You don't hear that often, that kind of advice actually, because I think people are very committed to their identities and to being segmented for their own control. What inroads have feminist and critical psychologists made in the field and what roadblocks remain?

CW: I think that things have changed a lot certainly since I did my PhD, which now is twenty years ago. And it's changed very much, so they've done a good job, they, we, things have really moved forward, for sure, in every way really. In terms of legitimacy, in terms of representation in the professional organizations, in terms of the relevancy of the discourse, in terms of everything. So it really has changed. The road blocks, at this point in time, are very much to do with the way in which, this is in terms of the U.K. because I don't know how it is in other countries, in that way, but in the U.K. big road blocks are the way in which research is assessed and valued. For [in] this research assessment exercise that we have every four years, which decides how the universities are funded, the system is such that certain types of research are valued more than others, and that's driven by ideology and therefore there's an in-built bias against the sort of work that we do here for example at this conference, qualitative, critical work. And as long as that's the case, that's going to be a big road block, very much so. So what we would need to do, I don't know how that would be done, but ideally what would need to be done is that *[that]* whole system of assessment is changed. And that the types of research that we would do here are valued in the same way as the other type, more mainstream research. But that's not happening. I: No C: So that has a big effect and as long as that's there it's a road block.

LG: I think I've pretty much covered everything. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about or anything that I have talked about that you want to expand or add on about psychology as a discipline, about feminism, about critical psychology, about your career, anything at all that I haven't asked that you think is important?

CW: I don't think so. Not really, perhaps the only last thing I would say is I might go back to the advice thing actually {1.29} that I initially didn't want to get involved in, what advice I would give. Because one other thing that just came to mind is that I think a lot of the structures and systems within which we work in academia, now at this time in history, really discourage a more old-fashioned sense of scholarship. Because it's all about output and producing and the production of publications and the usefulness as well for policy and this is what's valued. And there's very little emphasis on reading and scholarship and knowledge of areas beyond one's own little specialty. And again since I'm now doing the phenomenology I have to read more philosophical texts and really reacquaint myself, (some obviously are new) about these ideas, but I hadn't actually just sat down and spent time reading texts in the way that I do now. I've always rushed that because it was always a means to an end, whereas now I'm reading in a way that is an end in itself, even though later I can use the ideas. But it feels different, and I think that's

very nice and very important. I think it would be good to encourage that more and make people feel that spending three hours reading a book about hermeneutics is not a luxury but a necessary part of their work and shouldn't feel guilty about it, you shouldn't feel guilty about spending time reading things. I used to feel guilty about spending time readings things, I must rush this because I have to get on to the real thing, which is the thing that will be produced using outputs that other people can see. But now I feel actually that's wrong because we should not feel guilty about reading things that will contribute to our insight and understanding and general scholarship. Again, that doesn't get rewarded at all, anywhere, in terms of ways in which research gets valued and our work gets assessed. That's invisible and it's not something that is taken seriously. So I think I would say that we need to go back to that point, make students feel that this is important work.

LG: It's okay.

CW: It's okay, yeah.

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