

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Charlene Senn

*Interviewed by Leeat Granek
San Francisco, CA
August 18, 2007*

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CS: Charlene Senn, Interview Participant

LG: Leeat Granek, Interviewer

LG – The interview will be in three parts, in the beginning I will ask you some general questions about feminist identity and your involvement in the feminist movement. The second will be meshing feminism and your career; and the third part will be just a general summing up of all those things together. If at any time during the interview you feel that I am not asking you the right question, that you want to add something more or you have an anecdote you want to share, please feel free – just interrupt and expand.

The first question is just a very general question; how and when did you first develop a feminist identity?

CS – I think there were inklings as I was growing up, but I definitely did not know that they were there, it is all in the retrospect. I think really it developed in university through women's studies courses but not all of a sudden and not without interaction with my personal life. The first course I was taking, I was in a relationship with an abusive man at the time I was taking it and did not really see the connection of that course to my life. And, it was not until sort of the next course that I begin to deal with things that I saw the connection to my life and realized how important feminism was, and that I was from that point unstoppable.

LG – Ok, was this in undergraduate?

CS – Yes, it was in undergraduate, probably it would have been in my third and fourth years.

LG – And, where were you?

CS – At the University of Calgary, and they were the first women's studies courses offered at the university, there was no degree program. So the first course was just sort of a general course on women and autobiography. And the second course that really started to move me was on women and law.

LG – And after that moment or that process, did you have any involvement with the feminist movement, what kind of activities were you involved in?

CS – Yes I did right away, because I think I was mobilized in the women and law class. The instructor had shown "Not a Love Story"; and that movie moved me. I was currently working in

the industry, I was working as a bunny for men's stags. And so, I really identified with Linda Lee Tracey and sort of transformation from thinking that there is nothing wrong with what you are doing to starting to analyze it. So, it became impossible to do anything but fight against pornography from that point on. So, I immediately started going to feminist events in my community and it happened to be a time when a group called "Feminist Town Hall" had created [a] public meeting to speak out and so on, I started going to those events. They showed "Not a Love Story", and I remember sort of asking them question[s] afterwards; and they sort of realized that I think ooh, she is interested and so I became active from that point on.

LG – Ok, what kinds of things that the group would do other than holding meetings?

CS – Well, they did these public meetings, they did "Take Back the Night" marches. I was not involved in organizing at that point. I then started with some of my friends a group called "Theodora" which was named after the Byzantine empress who made rape punishable by death. And, we did direct action; we actually spray painted buildings, fought against red-hot video, fought against what we considered to be sexist and violent ads on television by plastering the windows of video stores and places that were using really bad ads.

LG – Ok.

CS – I also became around that time interested in women's health and women's body. And in a positive way as well, I think it was a corrective... sort of I needed both things in my life, not just the fight against violence. So, I was a founding member of "Calgary's Women's Health Collective"; we organized conferences, and cervical self-examination workshops, and workshops on, you know, the myth of PMS [Pre-Menstrual Syndrome] and all of those kinds of things.

LG – OK, and so what then attracted you to psychology? And, I, did you merge all this feminist activity with what you were doing?

CS – I think at first it did not meld. So, I had switched into psychology into my second year, I had entered university wanting to be a physician and I became very quickly alienated by my science courses and the competitiveness of my colleagues, of my peers. And, you know, the razor blading out of pertinent articles that you were supposed to read and things like that in the library; and, took an Intro to Psychology course and was very attracted to something about the discipline. I don't know what but it was like a light turning on kind of thing, and I knew I did not want to be in the sciences anymore. But, I think over the course of my undergraduate degree I had been very attracted to the idea of research; unlike most students who wanted to go into sort of the clinical aspect of psychology, from the beginning I was very interested in the research, my research method courses were my favourites. I took five undergraduate stats courses, I am a stat nerd. (laughs)

And so, that I was my attraction to psychology, so I had a bachelor of science in psychology. But, it was not connected at all to my feminism. But then, after graduation, I looked for a job for awhile, worked in secretarial and then finally got a job in a women's shelter, front line at a women's shelter. And that is kind of funny, not wanting to be a clinical psychologist and ending up by doing front line counselling. But there, the kind of shelter that it was, they were very

interested in women who had experience with abuse, but also who had done the reading, and it was not necessary to them that I have like a social work degree, like some shelters now require.

And so, that experience changed my life. Working front line with women who had been abused really changed things, but at the same time, the emotional toll on me, I think I had not really dealt with my own experiences and so it was much too difficult for me to do front line work. And I got out and went to therapy but I also then thought: a lot of what these women are {06:37} telling me is – after they had been in the shelter for a while, not in intake [where] they tell you about the physical abuse and the name he calls you on the intake but afterwards – after they have been in the shelter for a while they will begin to tell you about the sexual abuse and about the use of pornography in their torture basically, both as a weapon sort of to hurt them but also producing pornography of them and using it as a threat, and so on. And so I did what any good psychology undergrad would have done, I went to the library and started to find out what psychology knew about it and found that all the research was on men and acted like women never saw it. And so, that was then the time, I think I was trying to move away from front line work that I realized that I could contribute something still, by finding out or in fact I think I really hoped to just prove that pornography was harmful to women; make people recognize that.

So, I applied to go to graduate school and was accepted into the University of Calgary working with Lorraine Radtke, and I was her first graduate student. She was brand new and I was not [in] her area at all but she, I think, she knew instantly that I was not going to be convinced to study anything else, I only wanted to go to graduate school to study this and she agreed to let me and it was very encouraging.

LG – Wow. Ok, you have answered my next three questions! In 1993, you served as a consultant on the Human Rights Commission Tribunal on Pornography. Can you tell me a little bit what this tribunal does, what your role was, what that experience was like for you, how it came about?

CS – It was a very small role really. They contacted me because I was doing, virtually I think I was the only person in Canada who was looking at the effects of pornography on women. By then, I think, my Master's research had been published by then, so they knew about me through that. And, they had a case with two women who wanted to lay human rights complaints against corner stores for having pornography on display, and they wanted basically a consultant, they wanted an expert witness who would help them make the case. And so, I was involved sort of telling them about what the research said and what we do not know yet. And, my understanding is that eventually as with many problems with our human rights commission in Ontario was that the case basically timed out. They took so long to actually deal with it, that by the time they were getting around to it again, it had been too long; that was my understanding. So, it was not very satisfying, it was great to be asked, it was great to feel that you were actually making a difference to [the women] – I never met those women it was all sort of by phone call at that time – but, then it did not go anywhere.

LG – And then, they consulted you, so you would give them a statement on what you knew about it and would become part of their record?

CS – That’s right. And supposedly, it would eventually become part of the case but they never went forward with the case in the end. And for those women, I think they were sort of embroiled in that for a number of years without any remedy.

LG – I noticed related to this as that you are an expert courtroom witness. So, what is that? How did you get involved in that? And what does that work look like?

CS – Well, and again, this was my early career, I have not done anything like this recently. Again, as a graduate student I was hired by the Canadian Association of Community Living, the G. Allan Roeher Institute, which is like the research arm of that association, and at that time they were getting reports and they were aware that there was a problem with sexual abuse of people with intellectual handicaps. But there was nothing, virtually nothing, written or if there was they did not know how to access it and know what do about it. So, they basically hired me for a summer to compile a report for them on everything we can possibly know.

The result of that – I mean it was a very interesting research exercise because it was not anything I had been taught in university, even though by then I was a PhD student – I had to think, ok, if we do not have, if there are only a few studies, and there are these anecdotes, how else could you document that there is a problem? So, for example, I went through the law library and sterilization cases and found instances where sexual abuse risk or reality was actually cited as a reason why they were going to do forced sterilization of women. And so, I was able to then show that it was obvious that they knew there was a risk of sexual assault because that is why – in their mind – that is why they were sterilizing women. So, out of that came up, they actually ended up publishing it as a book, which was very exciting, and I think that was published in 1987 in something, I think, that was called “vulnerable” and you know about sexual abuse of people with intellectual [*handicap*], I think it was developmental disabilities by then, the language changed half way through.

Because of that I was then contacted by a crown prosecutor who had a case of a transport person, someone who basically drove [*handi-buses*] {12: 27}, who had seriously sexually abused two women who were reliant on him to be transported to their medical appointments and to various places. And so, in that case, they asked me to write a written report documenting what I knew and to, if possible based on the report of the women, talk about whether this was sort of, if this fit a pattern of the typical abusive situation between – which of course is virtually impossible – but luckily, I mean it absolutely did! It fit all of what we know so far. His threatening of them and telling them no one will believe them and all of those kinds of things. And I actually did in this case, get to sit outside the courtroom but was never called. So, in that, that was the consultation.

And again, it felt it was both hard because as a social psychologist you are taught to hedge and to not state anything firmly without being clear that you know well that this is within this margin of error and all of those kinds of things, and yet for a court case with a real woman’s life in the balance you have to also have a certain certainty about what you are writing too. And so it was an interesting process as a PhD student, it was a learning experience.

LG – Wow, and have you been called to court since then?

CS – No, I haven't. I think, no, I was hired by a municipality that wanted to restrict strip clubs; and that was an interesting one because they actually became convinced that it was a harm to women in the community, increasing street harassment and so on, so they actually used some of the research that had been done on sort of poisoned working environments and then sort of extrapolated to communities with high density of strip clubs...

LG – That is interesting.

CS – And so, that was a slightly different thing, not exactly a legal case but being used in a municipal kind of battle. But that was the end, that was the last. So, it really depends on, I think, people in court who were involved in these kinds of situations hearing about you or knowing about you and, I think it is a lot of (inaudible) {14: 47}.

{14: 52}

LG – Some of your research has focused on qualitative methods, including participatory research and focused on activism. And so, can you tell me a little about how you got involved in alternative methods, and the other question relates to – I was looking into through your C.V. – do you think psychologists should be merging their research with activism and if so, how do you see that happening?

CS – Ok. So, you may have to prompt me because I can sort of see two ways to come at that. So if I get lost and don't answer the last part of your question, prompt me.

LG – Okay, I will.

CS – I was trained very, very quantitatively. So, I have a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Science degree out of Calgary. And for my Master's I was basically required to do an experiment. It is no longer that kind of university now, you could do a history degree there, a history of psychology degree with no experiment but that was not the case [then]. So, I was very secure in my experimental methodology and so on, but when I went to York to do my PhD I basically felt completely like an imposter because all of a sudden people were talking about theoretical things and about qualitative research and I had no exposure whatsoever to them until that point. So, it was really a learning experience but, of course, the qualitative method fit much more closely in many ways with feminist politics and my concerns about the experimental study I did for my Master's. And sort of, what does it mean to show women pornography when you believe it is harmful to them? Those kinds of issues, which of course had, I had worked out an answer for myself on that previously. But the qualitative methods gave me another way of looking at things.

At the same time, I was not trained in qualitative methods, so, my PhD was a mixed methods study, but I would never have chosen a qualitative method alone, I would not have had the confidence at that stage. I did Q-methodology which is a mixed method, as you know, my entry into qualitative methods. Then, I have been basically self-taught and become more and more attracted to qualitative methods, at the same time, I continued to do quantitative studies and I had even done an experiment more recently, but just sort of (inaudible) {17: 24} experiment and so I

see a reason for them in terms of convincing people about the advocacy of certain things. But when you are in the process of doing qualitative research it feels more close to what you are trying to achieve, I think sometimes.

The research I did on youth exploitation and [the] sex industry was one of those accidents, it was something I had always cared about – especially given my own history – but it was a student in my class who was a mature student, who became interested [in it]. She basically asked me if I could help some youth in the community who were trying to convince our city that there was a problem of youth being exploited in the sex industry. And our city is heavily dominated by the sex industry; sort of known as the strip capital of Canada.

LG – Did not know that!

CS – Yes, it is not very a happy thing, and the city in my view is a pimp! It was licensing dancers and clubs and it was also licensing massage parlours and escorts requiring them to pay fees to the city every year in order to get their licenses. And [they were] proud of it! They have since been fought in court and {18:54} they have lost some battles but ... in any case. So I did that research and really it only made sense since it was the youth themselves who were politically active and who wanted to make social change that using anything less than a participatory action research method did not make any sense really. It is not the kind of project that you could then just, I could just do, it was their knowledge and experience.

So, that was the project where I first really did participatory action research and it was very challenging and [there were] lots of issues but [it] was wonderful as well. But the challenges are the things, I think, that make me think that you could not require all feminist psychologists or psychologists to necessarily build activism into their research. More studies would not get finished, I think, if we did that.

LG – It is so true.

CS – You know, for example, the youth scattered over time. They were under-housed and very poor and so on. So they move to other cities. They had – you know – real hardships, injuries and all of those kinds of things. So, the political piece never got done because we have said that, that was the youth piece. That does not feel that good. So, there are those kinds of outcomes that can happen that I think, then, are actually not as good as they [could have been] {20:17}, Perhaps if I had committed to take that on myself, then I could do it without the youth. But I am definitely moving more in my career towards directly apply[ing] research rather than research that has applied implications.

LG – Ok, can you tell me what you feel the distinction is between those two things?

CS – Ok, so I always researched things like violence against women always and, you know, the effects of pornography on women, how women think about pornography, what differences there might be between women on sexual assault. So those are all clearly – you know – real social problems that I am trying to contribute some understanding [to], some aspect of that. But more recently I became somewhat disillusioned that much of that stays in journal[s], and that the

people who are doing the interventions, the social activism in the interventions often do not have benefit of that knowledge. And so I decided to try and put some of the theories and knowledge into practice in rape resistance education program[s] for university women. So this is now, I am actually developing the programs, evaluating them, delivering them and so on. And so, that is a very different and stressful but exciting kind of research, but very different than the research I was doing before, and I imagine that I will be doing this for quite awhile.

LG – In 2001 you wrote a paper in *Theory and Psychology* incorporating feminist politics and theory in research. What do you perceive to be feminist politics, should psychology become more politicised, and, if so, in what ways would you like to see it that happen? Those are big broad questions; you can answer any part you want.

CS – Yes! And actually, that was a book review.

LG – It was a book review?

CS – It was a book review. I was reviewing two books. One was Rhoda Unger's *Twenty-Five Years ...* I am not remembering the title. [*Resisting Gender: 25 Years of Feminist Psychology*]

{22: 29}

LG – I am sorry I missed the ...

CS – Yes, no that's ok. I can still you know, I mean ... depends if you want me to still answer the question.

LG – Yes, I do... please answer the question.

CS – And then there was also a British book that I was reviewing at the same time, which was bringing post-structuralist theory into feminist psychology and so I was sort of just reviewing those two books.

So, whether psychology should become more politicized, is that ...? Psychology is politicized but it is politicized from the status quo, I strongly believe that. And yes, psychologists are generally liberal in thoughts and values, they generally have some belief in social justice I would think, for the most part. And yet so much of psychology is so individually-focused still, without ... with only, I think the difference is now that people know that they have to make some statement about cultural and social environment[s].

LG – And gender.

CS – Yes, in some way they have to mention that and then proceed to just fiddle with little variables that do not take into account any social context at all. They think that if they analyse for gender – even if there were no theoretical reason to analyse for gender – then that took care of gender. They then with that say that there was, you know, that there were not enough cases in each ethnic group to analyse based on race or ethnicity so therefore they did their best. And that

is the way most text books still read; it is the way most PhDs come to job talks - [to] talk about gender and race and all of those things. And so yes, I believe psychology should be more politicized, overtly politicized. I think that psychology should be used for more advocacy, to actually make a difference in people[']s lives and not just as therapy. Because I think many clinical psychologists believe they are making a difference in people's lives without that [work] having an analysis of gender and race, and sexual orientation, and ability. They are just, in my view, perpetuating the problem. So, I think we do need a more overt politics; then we also need to make the politics of existing psychology more visible, continue to do that as we have been doing for many years, unsuccessfully it appears.

LG – What do you think makes a psychologist a feminist? If any [reasons] you can think of.

CS – There are so many ways to be a feminist psychologist, I think that is one thing. For example, I know many psychologists who are feminist but their work is, they would not consider their work to be feminist psychology. I think there are many more of those people than there are actually feminist psychologists. Some of that is about self-definition because I can think of some of my colleagues who are definitely bringing their feminist values into their research, but it is not on a topic that looks like feminist psychology. And so, perhaps it is invisible to them as much as, you know, as it might be to other people. I think in general a feminist psychologist is someone who sees the limits of psychology, the individual approach in psychology, and who clearly places women and other oppressed groups at the center of their analysis and tries to – as much as they can {26:45} – to imagine how the psychology we think we know would be different if those people, if we were at the center, and move from there into their own work. I am not sure if that's ...

LG – Yes, it is. It is a great answer. You have had a prolific career publishing books and articles. What publication are you most proud of and why? And which publication [do] you feel has had the most impact? And they may be the same or they may be different.

CS – I think that my dissertation article which was on differences between women and their perspectives and experiences of pornography is probably the one I am most proud of. I think it probably will not stay that way very long because I am starting to do work now that I am very proud of, but there has been a big lag. To me, it is the article that brings me fully into it, it is the article that represents who I am and also, I think, is very complex compared to some of the other article[s] that I have published that, you know, had a very interesting finding or something, but it is a very limited piece of something. The article based on my dissertation, I think, women's voices come through it, and all women are not the same in it. So, it much more closely represents what I see as an ideal feminist psychology compare[d] to many of my other articles.

LG – Ok and the one that you think has had the most impact, is it that one?

CS – No, I do not think so. In fact I am, see this is an interesting question, because I am not so sure that any of my articles have had that big an impact.

LG – They must have had enough of an impact that people have contacted you to consult with you on these cases so...

CS – Well, that was early and so yeah, yes I am not sure.

LG – The research at least has had an impact.

CS – I think so in some ways. I think one of the problems among feminist psychologists who are publishing is that we tend to talk to each other, not on purpose but rather because, for example most of my research is not all suitable for the big social psychology journals, which means that most social psychologists do not read them and only other feminist[s] do. And then, they are not necessarily in your same area, so it cannot necessarily - or your work cannot necessarily - have that much of an impact and that is a problem, I think, for feminist psychologists generally. I think actually that the report I wrote about people with intellectual handicaps and sexual abuse had a lot of impact from what I have heard, from people in that community, those people first, and that many of the other groups liked it. And I have still seen [it] cited occasionally when people are working to try and get a change in their communities or in an institution. But of course that was not really my project, in one sense it was someone else's question. So I have to think about that, I do... hum, it is hard to think about that, I don't know.

LG – Ok.

CS – In some ways, some of my cited articles are the methodological pieces that I do for fun, that are fun {30:41}, but I don't think they are particularly meaningful. Things like how difficult it is to recruit men to studies, you know those kinds of things. Yes, it is important to know that it is going to be difficult to recruit men in these kinds of studies on sexual topics or so on, but it is not world shattering.

LG – Ok, every year you co-organize the FRGC, the Feminist Research Group Conference at the University of Windsor. Can you tell me a little about how the conference got started and what its mandate is? It is a wonderful conference, I loved it.

CS – That was you know, again (inaudible) {31: 20} is a wonderful thing. I had moved in my own career. I realized that I was doing a very good job of supervising my own students individually but that I was not actually connecting to my other students. I had no model for group mentoring, I had wonderful mentors but they all individually mentored me and I did not know their other graduate students very well or how to get to know them. So, I basically mentored the same way for awhile and then I realized that, sort of two students that I had, who were working on slightly different topics on violence against women but they had some questions in common, I realized that they were not even talking to each other and that this was to some extent my fault. That I created sort of a one-on-one relationship but had not said that there are other resources here, there are other women in your program who know something about this.

So I started to have group meetings, group supervisions in a sense, but over dinner with my own students about every six weeks. They decided on how often it was, and they decided that more often would not be fun! And so, we were having these meetings and you know, they have changed over the years, they started out being in everybody's homes, rotating through homes and

people cooking, and then I had a group that did not cook and so we went to restaurants and so on. But basically the word spread I think, that these were fun and they were valuable and so what started to happen is that students I did not supervise who were doing research, sometimes on feminist topic[s] but sometimes not, became very interested in talking about feminist research and they felt that they were missing something because they were not in this group. And, they asked me if I will be willing to sort of supervise or at least be a faculty mentor for a group of women who wanted to talk about feminist research. And so, I agreed and a group – I think there were twelve women in the first year at the very first meeting – and by the second meeting they had decided that they knew nothing, not only did they not know about the feminist projects going on in our own department (because there are four graduate program[s]) and women did not even [know] what each other were doing across those, but that they had no idea what was going on with other feminist[s] on campus who were student[s] but who were in philosophy or sociology.

And so, they decided that we needed an on-campus conference that was multidisciplinary so that they could find out. And, that first [year] they organized. Their basically feminist discussion stopped, and they spent the rest of the year organizing the conference, and it was a huge success. It was a single day conference, all consecutive papers so everyone went to all of them. And the first few years, the first year definitely most of them were psychology but there were a few from other discipline[s], and then they decided it was too good an idea to stop. And so they decided they would like to do it again and pretty soon it had changed – well, we had the advantage of having a PhD program so the graduate student[s] stayed around for a while – so, there was always some change over from year to year, but also some women who had been involved before. And, I think it was by the fourth year, we were getting emails regularly from women at other universit[ies] who had found out through a friend {35:02} that we had this conference and wanted to know if they could present. And of course, it was only local, it was only at our university at that time, so they decided that there was enough interest even when we had not advertised, that perhaps it should be opened up. And, at first it opened up in a small [area] (35:18) so a four hour's drive of Windsor. In Michigan and Ontario, then it went to all of Ontario and Michigan and then for two years it has been all of Canada and Michigan.

And it changed: the organizing committee is now multidisciplinary. It is still dominated by psychology – we have the largest graduate program in the social sciences, arts and social sciences so it sort of make sense – but now it is expanded to three days and it is a very exciting conference. I have been the faculty advisor now, this year would be my ninth year so there are eight conferences behind us. And I am thinking about try[ing] to hand that over to some junior faculty, I am going on sabbatical in 2008 hoping that there might be some other faculty who might want to take it over, but it has been a wonderful thing.

LG – Ok, I wanted to actually mention a few things on top, ask you about teaching. You have received several teaching awards and I was going to ask you which one is the most meaningful to you and why? And, also to ask you if you have a teaching philosophy, what is mentoring to you, who were your mentors?

CS – Ok, and again [like in all the pieces] (36: 44) so remind me if I forget anything. I love teaching yes, and...

LG – Clearly.

CS – Again, you cannot predict what this is going to be. As a Master’s student being assigned a graduate assistantship, I was horrified by the idea. I knew for sure I did not want to teach and was a graduate assistant for a research methods course and it was all I could do to make myself go in there. So, from that experience, it took a little while but it was fairly quick that I realized that actually I did like this teaching thing. And, I was lucky enough at York to have the opportunity to take a teaching course with a feminist, a feminist mathematician...

LG – Who was it?

CS – Pat Rogers who is now the Dean of Education at Windsor with us, we are really lucky that she is still around in my life. And, it is from her that I learned sort of which parts of what I was doing were feminist pedagogy and which part were other kinds of sort [of] critical pedagogy and so on. But, she was very important to my formation, the formation of my philosophy of teaching. And I think it is hard to say just what your general philosophy is. I think I teach differently in different levels of classes. I respect students, I do not teach only to the best students. I think really your success is measured by how much you are able to talk to students and connect things to their own lives. And, sort of seeing a student move from a D to a C can sometimes be as exciting as seeing sort of the A+ star who came into your class already achieving at that level and really they take advantage of every learning opportunity, so really you did not do much about it at all.

I think I try to learn from my students over time particularly, so I always revise my courses when I get feedback that there is something wrong, I believe them. They are always right you know, they may not be right about how to solve it but they are always right about where the problem is {39:12}. And recently it has been very exciting because I finally have been able to teach in my actual area of expertise for the first time. I [have] now taught a course called “Victims, Survivors, Warriors: Violence in the Lives of Women and Girls”. And, I have taught it twice now, and I am teaching it in Women’s Studies and now I am formally cross-appointed in the Women’s Studies [program]. And, that course is like coming home somehow, it is putting all of me in the classroom. Every bit, sort of everything and that is very exciting, that way I really enjoy it.

The teaching awards, I think probably – I mean they both mean a lot to me – because you had to be nominated by students, but I think that my faculty student award from my faculty of arts and social science, I think was prompted by my colleagues. I think that actually the part-time students’ association one, which was prompted by a mature woman student who took my psychology of women class, I think that was – is - more meaningful to me because she was so vivid in her explanation to me of why she nominated me. I was not aware that I had had that kind of impact on her life and so that was, it was just very personally meaningful and she stays in touch. That is a very nice thing.

LG – And the Feminist Mentoring Award, who nominated you for that?

CS – I think my graduate student nominated me for that one, and so yes that is very meaningful to me. It was a wonderful thing to know that I was carrying on the tradition of the way I had been mentored because I had two wonderful – I was so lucky – you know, I had Lorraine Radtke for my Master's. She was encouraging and critical with my writing, she changed the way I wrote entirely, you know, that I would hide because I had given her something and it was covered in these comments, you know she would be circling words that were used in ways she did not approve of and so on. And really, the writing and rewriting I did for her changed the way I write entirely and at the same time she was very caring and she was funny, all of those things, so that was a wonderful thing.

And then Sandra Pyke sort of taught me different things. She mentored me in how important it is to be connected with women outside of your university, so it is really through her that I became more active in the Section on Women and Psychology [SWAP], and sort of saw the history of psychologist-women in Canada as something that was actually connected to me. She was able to show me that web. She is also incredibly strong and brave, you know, all of those things. And she is also practical and sometimes I would really disagree with her practicality, and so we would have sort of disagreements about you know, things like whether graduate students should report sexual harassment. She was very aware of the costs to students and I was not yet, and so I would have little fights with her over that. You know, we don't always agree but she was a wonderful mentor and she continues to be. She taught that basically, until I got tenure, that she was there for me and she was. I remember calling in tears when I was not at all sure I was going to get tenure, and I don't know why exactly, but everybody goes through it a little bit. And her, even helping me then, that late in my career, so...

LG – Any other mentors that you can think of?

CS – I think the other mentor would probably be my mother who now identifies as a feminist but in a way, I think, she would not mean necessarily everyone's definition of a feminist. But, she basically taught me how to speak out and as a child I was mortified by it. My mom was one of those, she was a little tiny woman, she is under five foot tall but if someone cut in front of her in line {43:46}, you know, she would tell them off. And, she saw someone drop litter, she would pick it up and hand it to them and if her dinner was not right in a restaurant she would send it back. And, we would just be under the table, we thought it was a terrible thing but she really... from that I learn[ed] later to be strong and to stand up from myself and so, she modelled those things not in every aspect of her life but in many. So I would say that she was also a mentor to me.

LG – Ok, you mentioned SWAP, you can tell me a little bit about your involvement with SWAP and in what Division 35 has meant to you and your involvement in it.

CS – My first contact with the Section on Women and Psychology was as a Master's student. My supervisor encouraged me to send in my Master's thesis for the student's paper award. And I won it, much to my surprise, and so that was in 1985 as I [was] finishing and as I was moving to York. And, again I did not have much contact, I obviously went to SWAP's event[s] when I was at the Canadian Psychological Association [CPA] but I did not really, I think I did not understand what an organization like that did. And, I started to get a little [unclear] {45:09}

when I was working with Sandra but still not entirely, I think I did not ask the right questions because I did not know what to ask. And so, it was rather peripheral.

In 1991, I won a student paper award again for my PhD, and they were very, very smart those women. They said “Ok, you won it twice, I think you should be the student’s paper award coordinator, because you won it so turn around and give this back!” And they were absolutely right of course, and I did for – I can’t even remember how many years – I was the student’s paper [award] coordinator. And so that basically hooked me in and meant I had to go to the meetings and I came to develop through it a network of feminist colleagues across Canada and across area[s] of psychology that I would not have otherwise. And so, it has been very, very important, and I had not been really involved in Division 35 at all. I joined as soon as I joined APA [American Psychological Association], as a graduate student and I always read *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, all of the newsletters and so on, but I did not imagine how I would be involved from Canada. And APA is quite focused on the U.S. as [otherwise] it would be an international organization. So, I often did not see Canadian interests represented and I was not at all sure. But I am sort of feeling more connected these days and I am hoping to become more involved as time goes on, and especially once I am no longer a coordinator of the Section on Women and Psychology and I am taking my turn now to do that coordinator role. I gave up the student paper award to another student who had won the student paper award and so now I am doing the coordinator for one more year.

LG – And what would you say is your assessment of, you mentioned feminism in the States – what is going on in Division 35, what would you say is the state of feminism in Canadian Psychology?

CS – It is very hard, I think, for feminist psychology to have an impact in Canada on psychology as a whole. I think there are feminist[s] all across Canada who are doing great work and they are under-recognized. American psychologists generally do not meet Canadian psychologists, that is a general rule. And so, there is not enough permeation down. We read everything American feminists do, we read everything American psychologist[s] do, and they read virtually none of what we do. So, it is not a very equal relationship in many ways. We are completely aware of what is going on in the U.S. and they are not all aware of what is going on in Canada. And, we have the disadvantage, we have a huge country as they do, but we have a low density of population and so we are very unlikely, unless we live in Toronto, to have a group of feminist psychologists who work within a small area {48:31} who could actually sort of help each other and collaborate and all of those things. So, we have to work very hard to build those connections and then to collaborate across huge distances.

So, I think that has in some ways limited feminist psychology in Canada because, you know, there are a few people who do women and depression, so there is Janet Stoppard at UNB [University of New Brunswick] and there are definitely other people doing work on women and depression, but do they get to Fredericton, New Brunswick? Or do they actually - or does most of the collaboration that happens right there with Janet and her students...or same for me in many ways. So that is an issue, I think that is an issue. But at the same time, there is a benefit because it means that when we have our conferences, when we go to Canadian Psychological Association, we organize symposium[s] or we sort of encourage people to submit papers, we are

very likely to listen to other women's work that is not in our area. And so, I actually think that we are in some ways broader in our thinking about what feminist psychology is, and I probably bring more feminist psychology that is not specifically about violence against women into my work because I am constantly exposed to what clinical psychologist[s] or feminist psychologists are doing, developmental feminist psychologists are doing, and so on.

LG – That is very interesting, I have never thought about that.

CS – I think! That is sort of the hunch I have been getting, when you sort of see these highly specialized feminist conferences in the U.S. which could not happen in Canada because there are not, you know, there are five of us.

LG – (Laugh) There is more than that!

CS – (Laugh) But I mean, in any specific area it might only be five, so you know, you cannot really have a specialized conference. And that could be bad and good.

LG – Ok, wrap up questions, a few wrap up questions. What kinds of barriers, obstacles, or discrimination have you experienced because of your feminism or for being a woman or both or none or either?

CS – I probably, as both a feminist and a lesbian. I have taken the route of being out about both always. As a strategy it worked fairly well, because I would not be hired at place[s] [where] they are going to be very hostile to you. But I mean, there are obvious risks. I mean you would not get hired some places, but I actually did not apply to places as, you know, when I was looking for faculty position[s], I did not apply to McGill which I felt would be hostile perhaps to my feminism and to my lesbianism. And so I was attracted to places that had more applied social psychological frameworks, where people might be actually more interested in the kind of work that I do and so on, and that would mean that the students would be attracted to that place.

So, I would say that I probably experienced less discrimination because of that. So right from the time, I mean, I did my job talks on two approaches to the study of the effects of pornography on women. But you know, yes I can show that I am very competent methodologically but there is no way that they could not realize what kind of topics I was going to be studying, and that I am not interested in doing straight social cognition or social psychology, not on social issues. So, you know, that does help I think in many ways. As a graduate student I think there was discrimination around being lesbian. I certainly heard one faculty member who - I was walking down the hall passing the computer lab {52:38}- (the person was a sessional instructor but is now a prominent clinical psychologist in Canada), said to another graduate student - I had no idea what the lead up was to this - but: "You know that lesbian in the department". And it was clear that they were talking about me. Well, of course I thought it was funny on a number [of] point[s] since York's psychology [program] has 330 graduate students and there were many more lesbian[s] than just me in the department, so this was not exactly a good description.

But, you know, there were those kind of things that you heard and you knew there was stuff going on behind but, you know, not direct to your face so much. I had to come out to graduate

students consistently because they were making comments about gay people and you know those kinds of things, but you sort of get used to those. And of course the more out you are, the less you hear those things, other people hear them but they do not say to your face. Certainly in one of my graduate classes, I was told that my feminist's view[s] were not welcomed by a professor and that kind of thing, and I got a lower grade, I got an A-, which is not really grievable, a B would have been grievable in that same course. So, there are those kinds of moments where you feel like that is the case, but in general, I feel that I have been lucky, luckier than many.

LG – And what advice would you give to a feminist woman working in psychology now?

CS – Well, there are many things, I think. I think one of them would be that if you want to have, if you want to work in [a] hospitable environment, it is better to be out about your politics from the very beginning. As a strategy for me, compare[d] to some of my colleagues that I saw who basically went and hid their feminist politics, waited [until] they got tenured and then sort of started to do the work that they want[ed], I think often you forget what work you wanted to do, that there is a personal cost to suppressing that part of yourself that I was not willing to endure. So, everybody has to make their choices and for me, that has worked as a strategy. But I think the other advice I would give is not to become too disciplinary – for feminist psychology I think it is really critical that your primary identification is not necessarily with psychology. I think that staying active in your community, around women[']s issues I think, reading across disciplines, going to conferences where there are multiple disciplines presenting and so you hear different views. I think all of that helps us to stay honest and not get sucked into the individualistic focus of psychology. As much as you think we do not do it, I think if we isolate ourselves and believe in the profession of psychology, and the more we sort of spout that language the more likely we are to cut off other feminist activist's views and those kinds of things. I found that staying, being involved in my community, in feminist issues generally, going to conferences and all of those kinds of things are important, and I mean grassroots conferences as well, not just academic ones.

LG – Ok, I want to respect your time, so I will stop of asking you any of my questions. Is there anything at all that I have asked you about or have not asked you about that you would want to expand on? Is there anything that I left out about yourself, your career, psychology in general, feminism in general, psychology and feminism, anything at all?

CS – The only thing I can think of is that, I think, an important part of being a feminist mentor, and also a feminist teacher to some extent, is to be transparent about our own process. I think that is necessary because many times my mentors – you know I really did think that Sandra Pyke was the most terrifying and wonderful human being that I have ever met. I mean, she was bigger than life especially in the early years of my being her student and she in later years beg[a]n to talk to me about her life {57:16} a bit, and it helped me to realize that I was not [feeling] the ways I thought that I was [feeling]. It made me realize that, you know, this is not a linear path just like history is not a linear path towards progress [and] right, there are cycles in all of our lives, in how well we feel we are doing our work, in sort of how much we respect what we are doing, in how much we think we are (inaudible) {57: 44} towards [a] feminist's principle, in so many ways there are ebbs and [flows] {57:52}. So, I almost dropped out of my graduate program in my second year of my PhD. I just all of a sudden lost my way and wondered where I

was going, and Sandra was away on sabbatical. She told me to call her [if] I needed anything or email her or any of those things but, I did not [know] whether to believe her, even though it was what she said. So that experience showed me that there are often these times and we gloss over them and when we just we look at somebody's C.V. we sort of see how it looks all shiny and, you know, it is such a polished picture, but it was not like that for any of us, I do not think.

People have children during their graduate program and it is hard, and they wonder whether they should be doing both, we break up with a partner, and we – sort of – have chaos, and our families do not cooperate and get sick, you know all of these things, you know. And, so I think that boundaries are very important to empower relationships to make sure there are no violations. I think, in the beginning I was overly rigid about those boundaries, I never wanted to replicate those bad power relations that I had seen in graduate school. But because of that I think that over time I realized that I was actually isolating my students from my experience and that I was not showing them the reality of my – sort of – development and career because I was [not] talking about anything personal. And so I have come over time to think that there is a certain level of transparency that is critical, if we really are going to help each other go through these processes and become the feminist psychologist we want to become, and become the feminist we want to become in our lives and that we are always becoming, we are not necessarily just there.

LG – Well, thank you so much, that was a wonderful interview.

CS – Oh, you are welcome!