



**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Christine Griffin**

*Interviewed by Lois Donnelly over Zoom™
February 25, 2022*

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Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Christine Griffin

Interviewed by Lois Donnelly

**Conducted over the Zoom online platform
February 25, 2022**

Lois: I'm Lois Donnelly interviewing Professor Christine Griffin on 25th February 2022 over Zoom. And we are discussing their life and career in the context of feminism and its history within psychology as well.

So, first of all then, could you just tell me a little bit about yourself, so maybe along the lines of the trajectory of your career and the topics of your work.

Chris: Yeah, so I'd be the first member of my family to go to university. I came from Lancaster in the Northwest of England, and I started off doing a psychology degree at Aston University in the early 1970s, and I didn't really know what psychology was at the time. There were no psychology A levels. But I'd seen an older girl at the school I went to who was doing a PhD in psychology and I just thought, "Oh that sounds interesting," but still without really knowing what it was.

And I got a place at the University of Birmingham, which was a very traditional, experimental, positivist department run by a Professor Broadhurst who did research with rats. And luckily, I messed up my A levels, so I didn't get in, but I did get a place at the University of Aston's very new human psychology degree. And it was unusual because it was human, just human behaviour, not animals as well, which at the time was unusual, only ten students, quite young staff, quite a social psychology focus. I had no idea about this at the time. But it really suited me. And then after I'd finished the degree, I thought I might do a PhD, this was the mid-1970s, and in those days it was much easier to get a grant. I was interviewed at Birmingham University by Mick Billig as a potential supervisor, and I knew he'd done research with Henri Tajfel about social identity, experimental research, and I wanted to look at women's gender identity, but I didn't really know how. There weren't really theories, there certainly weren't feminist theories in psychology. All the research that had been carried out was mainly with young men, college students or sixth form as in Tajfel and Billig's case. And there was some sort of, some work about gender roles, sex roles, gender stereotypes. But I was interested in identity.

So, I started this PhD without really much of an idea what I was going to do, and nor did Mick, to be fair. But we got on like a house on fire and had similar interests. But I ended up – in those days it sort of wasn't possible to use qualitative methods in a psychology PhD. Mick was doing interviews for the book that became *Fascists* about members of the National Front, so he was using interviews. But the idea of a PhD student doing it just didn't figure. And most of the research about gender was about sex differences with biological explanations, the search for differences, any differences must be biological.

So, I ended up doing a load of experiments that I wasn't really interested in and a very open-ended questionnaire at the end just asking young women students what gender meant to them. But I didn't have any way of making sense of it. And it was before Jenny Williams and Howard Giles wrote a paper that came out in 78 and Glynis Breakwell in 79 as well which was sort of thinking about how you could apply Tajfel's social identity theory to gender and women's experiences. But that hadn't happened.

So, I nearly left academia in disgust really. I was going to be a yoga teacher.

Lois: Wow! (Laughter)

Chris: And partly over the dissatisfaction with methods, but also in relation to how to understand gender. And sort of by chance the job in Cultural Studies came up which was a research fellowship for three years looking at young working class women leaving school and entering the job market. It had been funded by the Social Science Research Council which became the Economic and Social Research Council later, and it was set up by a woman called Halla Beloff who was at Edinburgh University, she's dead now. And it was set up to put a social psychologist into an interdisciplinary department, so it was a job for a social psychologist doing a project in cultural studies which I didn't know a great deal about.

[0:06:17]

So Halla, I think Halla, I don't know if Halla Beloff was on the interview panel, but Mick Billig certainly was, Stuart Hall, Paul Willis, were on the interview panel, and I got the job and joined a completely different department. You could not get more different than the department I had done my PhD and where Mick Billig who of course is now internationally known as a social psychologist, was completely looked down on by the very authoritarian head of department who when I first joined to do my PhD Broadhurst summoned me to his office and asked me how I was going to manage. I was married at the time, I'd just got married, I got married very young, and he said how was I going to manage doing housework as well and looking after my husband as well as doing a PhD. So that tells you all you need to know about his approach.

Lois: Yes, interesting.

Chris: Very authoritarian top-down approach to, you know, and very narrow view of psychology in Birmingham psychology department, as it still is actually.

And cultural studies, the centre [Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies], was informed by Marxist and feminist, anti-racist work. It was run as a collective as far as possible. It was truly interdisciplinary, really transdisciplinary, although cultural studies now has become a sort of media studies based discipline in its own right. Then it was really just everybody working on common projects and the focus was the project, not what disciplinary background you came from, although it did make a difference.

And the focus was on popular cultural practices and their significance.

So, to me as a social psychologist, because I was interested in young women and small groups, this was a way of making sense maybe and I began to get exposure to feminist ideas.

And I did the project on young women and work it was called and it was published as a book called Typical Girls in 1985, although I was on the dole unemployed for a year when I wrote it. And then, so that was quite difficult. But I returned eventually to psychology. I got a two year research post at the Centre for Mass Communication at Leicester University in the early 80s to look at black youth unemployment, but it was a very, a questionnaire based study and quite traditional. And then I got a lecturing job at Birmingham University which had been Mick Billig's old job because he moved to Loughborough. So, I worked there from 1985 to 2003, but by that time I'd got a network of people that were doing similar youth-based research in psychology and out of psychology, and sociology and so on, and I then... I suppose I knew Sue Wilkinson and Sue Condor because Mick supervised her PhD. And she'd done a PhD about gender and feminism using qualitative methods. And Sue was a real pivotal person, Sue Wilkinson, and she asked me to contribute book chapters and talks at symposiums, but psychology conferences or social psychology conferences about qualitative methods, and then her book Feminist Social Psychology I did a chapter in that.

So, I started to get back into psychology and bring back the ideas that I'd come across and the work I'd done in cultural studies to psychology. And all sorts of developments had happened in the

meantime, I guess. And I've got an ongoing interest since then really on young women's lives and how they negotiate femininity and gender, but also in relation to sexuality and race and class, and always set in a wider discursive and ideological and cultural context, so I was never looking at identity as a sort of a thing you are or you aren't, but what it means, something that's negotiated. So, I'd always been looking at cultures I suppose, drinking cultures, free parties, music festivals, what they mean to young people, young men and young women.

[0:12:00]

Lois: Yeah, that's really interesting. Thank you for talking through that. I suppose I was just going to ask in follow up then, so do you feel like you, I suppose going from the PhD, which was a bit uncertain, as you said, in terms of the methods, into that cultural studies, did you feel like you learned a lot through that and kind of how did that influence your work?

Chris: Yes, I mean hugely because I was sharing an office. I mean cultural studies, although it was at the time in the early 80s was producing books that were influential all over the world really, like the Empire Strikes Back, which was the race and politics group, Women Take Issue, the women's studies group and so on, Policing the Crisis, it was really small, it was like a half a corridor in a tower block, 60s, hideous 60s tower block at Birmingham University. So, it was really small. And we used to get visitors from all over Europe and America and Australia. Bob Connell came before she became Raewyn, masculinity researcher, and they would say, "Oh is this it?"

So, I was crammed in an office with Angela McRobbie and Paul Willis and others, Trisha McCabe, you know, it was very sort of everybody in together. And there were all these reading groups where we, like on work or leisure or education, where we took a topic and you could either join or not and you'd take a topic, read around it, and discuss it. So, we were discussing things all the time. And if you were in a particular group that was writing up a book and working on a bigger focus project, then the group closed, and you concentrated on that.

So, I wasn't in any of those groups that were working on books because they'd started before I joined. But I mean I just learned a huge amount about methodology from people like Paul who is a really good ethnographer, because he was doing work, actually he finished the work for Learning to Labour which was in schools, but he was doing work in Longbridge, a big Birmingham car factory, since deceased. So, he was talking about what was happening in his research, and also Angela McRobbie and a load of others about feminist theories, there were huge arguments about the challenges that feminism and anti-racist work posed for Marxist approaches, sort of race and class, race and class and gender and sexuality and how to think all of that together. So, they were very heated. Very heated discussions.

And, of course, huge political changes because Margaret Thatcher's Tory government had just come in in 1979 and I started the project in January 79 and that came in in the summer. So, huge changes. Massive increase in youth unemployment very suddenly, 20 different ways of calculating youth unemployment by the government, all of which lowered the figures, you know, all sorts was going on.

Lois: Yeah, so that kind of historical and political context really influenced your learning in that sense.

Chris: Yes, it did, yes. So it was, I learned a lot about methodology as well as the feminist, different feminist ideas.

Lois: Yeah, how interesting, yeah, lovely. And so, yeah, you spoke about then getting a network of people I suppose and getting to know those people. How was that and how important was that for you then within your work and your career?

Chris: Well, I think it was essential once I'd moved to the lectureship at Birmingham University, or left cultural studies really, because from then on, I was working in a place where nobody really was sympathetic to my work, didn't understand it, didn't respect it. So, I was just tolerated. So, you know, I taught, of course, a final year optional course on gender and social psychology I think it's called for years at Birmingham, which was popular with the students, and it was really about feminist, well, it was about social psychology and then feminist theories and debates. But I was just accepted as

doing it, but I never was really, I don't think I would be seen as a real psychologist because I was using qualitative methods mainly. And also, the gender stuff I think was just ignored.

So, I depended entirely on networks of the sort of people who were doing similar work to me and some of them were in psychology and a lot were not. They were in sociology, anthropology, youth research and also. And later on, business studies when I got involved in research on consumption and identity. So, I've never gone to psychology conferences, even women and psychology conferences, consistently because the work I was doing was all over the place.

[0:18:10]

Lois: Yes, so that kind of interdisciplinary setting I suppose really important throughout that.

Chris: Yes.

Lois: Great, okay. So, yeah, so, I suppose when you first were thinking about going in the direction of psychology then, you touched a bit on that already, but what exactly attracted you to that kind of work?

Chris: I think that I was interested in identity and in small groups, not individuals because psychology as a discipline, well, now and then, has such a focus on the mind, the brain, the individual. And I was interested in small groups of people and how they interact together. And Tajfel's, theoretically, his ideas about social identity in an early paper he did in 1972 I think, which was theoretical, not empirical really, I thought was really interesting. So, what do you do if you are in what he calls a minority group, which, of course, means a subordinated group, and women are one of those, and so are many other groups, what do you do psychologically with that if you're getting messages that you are somehow inferior or deviant or deficient? And how do you make sense of that? How do you negotiate the world in which you live as an individual but also collectively?

I suppose what cultural studies gave me was an idea of the more collective culture. But it's also sort of what everyday social interactions mean to people in the context, in the historical context and political context. And how we negotiate our worlds, ourselves and produce ourselves and transform ourselves in the world. So, it was that that I was interested in, but I didn't really find the theories or the methods in psychology then really, or they were just beginning and so I would read more, all sorts of different feminist work. Yeah, so I think...

Lois: Yeah. Yeah, so did your feminism come around at that time then whilst you were exploring that, or do you think you had those thoughts before started on the psychology?

Chris: Yes, I think it actually started when I was a teenager because I was born in the early 50s, so I was born in the shadow of World War Two and I was really interested in this thing that had happened, interesting we're talking on the day, you know, all sorts of stuff is happening in Ukraine. And how people behave when things continue in their lives when things like that happened and of course I read about the Holocaust. And then, so I would read autobiographical accounts of ordinary people who'd been through these tumultuous events. And then when I was a teenager I got heavily into music, popular music, and particularly soul music, which of course was so linked to what was going on in the States, the USA. My dad for some reason bought home Time and Newsweek magazines, so I read these voraciously, and there were all sorts of uprisings going on, the civil rights movement, the Black Power movement. And it was linked with what was happening in the music world. So, I was interested originally in the anti-racism, anti-Vietnam War movements in the States, but I wouldn't have been in any political groups. I was just reading about it.

And then my... and in Ireland, of course, I lived in Birmingham. In 1974 there were the pub bombings by the IRA which killed and injured 200 people and I was nearly in one of those pubs. It was very near the university. So, I followed the politics in Ireland too.

And so, I think I just was used to, that's what I was interested in. And then that sort of popular culture and activism and trying to understand politics. And so, and I don't think I'd thought much about my position as a woman apart from a sense of objecting to way I was always, you know, first of all, a

focus as a young woman, a focus of the male gaze, which I wouldn't have seen it like that then, and also dismissed and ignored at the same time. So, when I started, I think I was in a consciousness raising group before I joined cultural studies when I was doing my PhD, but when I joined cultural studies, I came across just a lot more activism, but I hadn't had any contact with. So, I got involved in, I think we squatted at a house because there was no refuge for what were called battered women in those days. So, it was like the early beginnings of Women's Aid in the UK. So, we squatted a building to use as a refuge and things like that. So...

[0:24:23]

Lois: Wow. That's amazing.

Chris: Yeah. So, I would have been involved in Birmingham's radical feminist group, which are still the feminists everybody else really disliked, but to me they were the only ones who were theorising sexuality and challenging the way rape was dealt with and sexual harassment and assault in ways that made sense for the experiences of the girls and the young women I was working with in the Typical Girls project who were seen as sexual beings. So, that's why I got interested in that really.

And then later in the early 80s I worked with Trisha McCabe. We ran a girls' group in a youth club in Birmingham for quite a few years, because girls didn't go to youth clubs and all the full time youth workers in the whole of Birmingham were male in the early 80s. So, it was like single sex work with girls was a way of building, you know, doing something that girls were interested in.

So, yeah, so I got into it through that, I think.

Lois: Oh, that's so interesting. So, that kind of activism side of things started quite early I suppose?

Chris: Yes, yes, yeah.

Lois: Yeah, and...

Chris: Yes, an interest in it and then when I came across things that I could get involved in and I did.

Lois: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, and so that kind of was developing almost at the same time as you were getting into the cultural studies and all that sort of...

Chris: Yeah, I think so. I mean there was nothing like that in any other academic department, and the Centre for Cultural Studies had an ethos of being politically engaged and did a lot of work in local schools and things.

Lois: Yeah, that's really interesting because psychology wasn't as much kind of seen as political or able to be political.

Chris: No, well, quite the opposite because the BPS had an edict of being apolitical and I didn't join, I mean I very belatedly joined the BPS just before I retired. I can't remember why. But all the way I ran a BPS women and psychology conference in 1991 at the, I wasn't a member, I had no time for it at all actually. Yeah, because of that, because of this, we're apolitical, we shouldn't be political. So, I just thought that was completely misguided, particularly because the BPS newsletter had published a piece on race and intelligence by a guy called Rushton who was basically, I mean Mick Billig did a lot of critiques of racist work of psychologists at that time. So, one point they were saying we're apolitical, but then they published things like that and there was a big debate about whether they should have published it and anti-apartheid boycotts of South Africa and things like that. So, there were a lot of debates that Steve Reicher would have been involved in heavily.

Lois: Yeah, that's so interesting. Yeah, so one foot in, one foot out of it really there.

Chris: Yes, yes, yeah. Yeah.

[0:28:10]

Lois: Yeah, okay. So, yeah, switching gears then a little bit, I suppose you've mentioned your PhD supervisor and those networks, but did you have any other key mentors on your journey or even now or anything?

Chris: Yes, yes. No, it was interesting that question about mentors because I think when I started out, the things I wanted to do I couldn't have put it into words what I wanted to do. There wasn't a way of Thinking about it in psychology really, and in a way, I think I wrote, there was a sort of editorial of Feminism and Psychology, the journal, not that long ago. I don't know if it was 30 years on from when it was launched or whatever it was, that we had to, it took us two years of planning the journal and normal journals it's like six months and off you go. But we had all those editorial meetings for ages, and it's like we had to imagine the space in order to create the possibility of doing the work. And I think when I started off, I had like no clue. But I came across just some people who gave me hints that this was a possibility. So, I think Halla Beloff actually, who was based in Edinburgh for years, and she did have an interest in women's identities and so on. And a lot of her work was on art and all sorts of things. But she had that openness to not just doing psychology, from a narrow experimental positivist approach to the mind and understanding how the mind works, but actually to see people's lives in context.

And my PhD was examined by Marie Jahoda who was a real force. I mean her, the history of her work with Paul Lazarsfeld in Marienthal and the psychological consequences of long-term unemployment in the 30s, you know, she was an activist psychologist and fled the Nazis and all sorts of things. Actually, she did say in my PhD viva what relevance do you think this has for people living in Handsworth and poor areas of Birmingham? And I said, "Well, none". You know? (Laughter)

And, yeah, she was amazing but sort of older and like a different generation. So, I think Halla was sort of closer to, you know, I could see that here was a woman operating in psychology and doing what different things – not what I wanted to do, but different. And Mick Billig, he forged a path of doing what he wanted to do and looked beyond psychology as a discipline. I mean he read and always read historical, looked at the history, and always looked at the history of gender or youth or whatever. So, the book Representations of Youth is partly looking at the history of the concept of adolescence, and it was things like Mick and, yeah, he would understand that you'd find out as much about how race and racism worked by reading James Baldwin as you would – in fact, you'd find out more from reading James Baldwin than psychology research. So, he, you know, and he had, he just would say, "Well, experimental research is all very well, but you're not going to find out anything that really matters".

So, he was supportive in that way just in thinking critically but independently, but he had a blank spot when it came to gender really at that time.

So, I think in terms of gender, I don't think I had mentors, but I think I had collaborators. So, it was more people like Sue Wilkinson, and Susie Skevington who was in Bristol and Bath and Trisha McCabe. So, and Helen Haste, I think. But Susie Skevington and Helen Haste were previous generations of feminists they were in psychology, both at Bath where I ended up interestingly. So, I think they were, but they weren't direct mentors or collaborators, but they were sort of role models who were out there, I think.

Lois: Yeah.

Chris: Yes, so I don't think I had like an obvious mentor because for what I wanted there wasn't anybody doing what I wanted to do. So, it was just occasional people. I suppose Stuart Hall, you know, just whose work was interesting. Yeah, so, yeah.

Lois: Yeah, that's really interesting. So, people who you worked with or saw from afar maybe a bit more than mentoring directly.

[0:34:25]

Chris: Yes, and if you think of the history of feminism in the 20th century, last century, you know there'd been a lot of activism around women's suffrage and related issues that then faded and then there was a resurgence, so-called second wave, in the 1960s. So, it's almost like there weren't mentors there somehow. It was quite strange, yeah. Something to do with the way psychology has gone and academia has gone.

And there were very few women in academia actually when I was at Birmingham. Even when I was a lecturer. It's a big university. There were like six women professors. And that's miniscule.

So, it was run, it was just... and yeah, when I was an admissions tutor, this would be in the 90s, myself and Ros Bradbury, another lecturer, we were in the science faculty, so went to a science faculty admissions tutors' meeting, we were the only women there. And the man who was chairing it said, "Oh ladies, lady admissions tutors". This was the 90s.

So, you know, it was really different. I forget actually how horrendous it was.

Lois: Yeah, I mean, yeah, definitely things have changed, haven't they, over time I suppose. So, yeah, I mean you yourself have forged a path in that sense. So, have you taken any key role in mentoring yourself? Has that been...?

Chris: Well, I suppose I have in relation, both I think individually would be in relation to PhD students. So, people like Martin Holt who's in Australia now, Andrew Bengry-Howell who I've worked with quite a lot. And quite a lot of different PhD students. Linda Bailey's a more recent one, young women and drinking. And I think sometimes PhDs I've examined, and that's a sort of one to one thing, or researchers I've worked with, Sarah Willott is another one. So, there's quite a few PhD students.

But I think there's also like a more collective mentoring of say when we launched Feminism and Psychology, in a way that, I see that as a mentoring role because we were opening up a space for women and men to do this work and get treated seriously and respected.

And also, because I organised a women and psychology conference at Birmingham in 1991, and I see that as a mentoring thing, although I don't think it worked actually. It was because I'd been to quite a few feminist conferences, which wouldn't count as academic conferences, that were just, there was a women's WRRRC, Women's Research and Resources Centre, which was... and then there was Trouble and Strife, which was a radical feminist magazine. I think they had a conference. They were feminist research conferences. This would be in the 80s. So, I'd been to those, and they were a combination of academic papers, sort of theory papers, empirical papers, people's PhDs or projects they were doing and sort of activist workshops all together.

And so, I tried to bring some of that to a women and psychology conference that was academic and had papers and workshops and worked with others as well. Ann Phoenix, I think would be a really important collaborator actually. So, yes, and so, yeah, I worked with her a lot. And Kum-Kum Bhavnani as well. So, yes, so we did the conference and so, for example, I invited a Dr Maire O'Shea who worked, she was a psychiatrist in Dublin, and she'd been supporting the Birmingham Six who were wrong, you know, 25 years in jail for being fitted up for the Birmingham pub bombings. And she had been doing something on the psychological impacts of strip searching. So, I invited her to do a workshop and things like that.

And so, things like that I would see as mentoring. And when I say it didn't work, what I mean was a few years down the line after that, there was another women and psychology conference that was much more traditionally academic and of course I understand the pressures on, particularly now, even more, having to fill all the, jump all the fences and so on to do academic work in an acceptable way. So that sort of more activist edge was lost, but I think that was a change from the 80s into the 90s anyway that was happening across the board.

[0:40:26]

Lois: Yeah, that's interesting. You felt like that activism side of things was really important when you were starting that?

Chris: Yes. And it sort of has been pushed to the side and separated. There's more of a gap between sort of activism or activism and academia than there was. And also, it's been turned into all this stuff about, I can't even remember the jargon now. Like knowledge transfer and all that sort of stuff. And impact, that's it, impact. Impact.

So, it's been turned. So, things that were about activism have become all this stuff about impact case studies which is not quite the same thing. Yeah, it's a different...

So, we used to have debates about power relations in research, and suddenly that became all about research ethics, which of course overlaps but it's not the same, some things are lost in those debates.

Lois: Yeah, that's really interesting. Yeah, almost like a simplification of those concepts, I guess.

Chris: Yeah, yeah, yes.

Lois: Yeah. Okay. Brilliant. Yeah, so obviously you've mentioned that you're a founding member of Feminism and Psychology. Did you want to say anything more about that and what that process of setting that up was like and whether that's influenced your perspective on feminism and psychology and how that's developed at all?

Chris: Yes, I mean I think because the journal was first published in 1991, but the group, the core, the editorial group, which also did include Ann Phoenix and Kum-Kum Bhavnani a bit later I think, but certainly they were involved too. But we met for two years at the offices of Sage in London to work out what we wanted it to look like and the processes. And it was like a very long process really. And, yes, it was like we had to imagine it into being first. And, of course, once it had come out, it was like, well, this is great. But you soon forget.

I think we were trying to make sure that there was a sense of collective, you know, that it wasn't just like any other academic journal really.

Yeah, so, yes, and I think other people have written in the journal about the history of it as well.

Lois: Yeah, sure. Yeah, so were you all part of a network before you started that, or did you...?

Chris: Yes, I suppose I knew... I can't remember actually, but I certainly knew Sue, Sue Wilkinson, Sue Condor, Jenny Williams, because she'd written about gender. And Jan Burns I knew less well. She was involved as well, but she was clinical psychology. But I'd come across all of them before at probably mainly social psychology conferences. Like BPS social section conferences. Sometimes there was a London BPS conference in December that I think I might have come across some of them. And also, in the second half of the 80s, Sue Wilkinson had had a symposium on qualitative methods at the BPS social section conference, I think. So, I think I'd met people there, I think. So, we already knew each other. And there probably weren't all that many of us actually thinking about it. (Laughter) Yeah, so, but we knew there were people all over the world as well doing similar work.

Lois: Yeah, that's interesting. Okay.

Chris: Yes.

Lois: Yeah, so okay, well, changing a little bit again then, a bit more about, kind of as you were saying, you've done a lot of work around young people's constructions of themselves and drinking culture and things like that. Do you want to tell me a little bit more about those kinds of projects?

[0:45:40]

Chris: Yeah, so I think the thing that I became interested in sort of after I moved from Birmingham to Bath, which was 2003. When I moved to Bath, and this was a department that had been set up by Susie Skevington and Helen Haste, and also Richard Velleman, who's an alcohol researcher and

David Gooding, who did work on science and communication. So, it was a small department. But it was, and isn't any more tragically, one of the few places in the country along with, Loughborough would be another, and University of East London I suppose would be, Manchester Metropolitan University, you know, there are other departments, the way you could do critical and qualitative and feminist work, and it would be valued as opposed to not allowed at all or just tolerated.

So, after I moved there, that was when I started to get, my work was respected. So, and I also had got an ESRC grant with Ann Phoenix I think before I left Birmingham about young people and consumption and identity. And so, then I wanted to do something about drinking, young people and drinking because at the time in the 1990s and into the 2000s, there was a heavy sort of culture of intoxication going on which was partly to do with how the booze industry was marketing sort of alcopops really to young people, and also there were gender changes in who was drinking and how they were drinking. So, I was interested because when I'd been doing the Typical Girls research the young women, I was working with were not expected to get drunk. I mean sometimes they did get drunk, but when they went out, they were not expected to get drunk like the boys. It was seen as unfeminine.

And by the 1990s onwards, this culture of intoxication and a different way of marketing booze, young women were expected to get drunk alongside young men. But it was also still seen as unfeminine. So, I thought well, this is one way of trying to understand how they deal with that, and also it seemed to me it was something to do with the post-feminist moment and period of very sharp contradictions in relation to femininity. So, this impossible dilemma of how to manage these contradictory messages and imperatives.

So, that's why I got interested. And, of course, debates in post-feminism were going on with people like Ros Gill, for example, and Valerie Walkerdine actually is really important because she was doing, thinking back, she was doing work on girls and maths when I was doing Typical Girls. So, there were people like Valerie, very much more informed by psychoanalytic ideas than me. And Helen Lucy who I worked with at Bath. So, there were others.

So, yeah, so I got interested in it from that perspective really. And I'd always been interested in young people and young women's lives because they are trying to negotiate sometimes quite contradictory and difficult pressures as they're growing up.

Lois: Absolutely, yeah, and those changes are quite clear in their lives. Yeah, okay. That's really interesting. And then I suppose in line with that more recently and that's been involving some more work around social media and digital research, so how has that been, and have you faced any issues with that kind of research?

Chris: Yes, I mean I was interested in that because I was interested in the ways in which young women and men were represented and represented themselves on a lot of posts and marketing related to drinking. So, and also the ways in which online we are the product, we're the thing that's being sold, our data, you know, is the product. And so I was, but again I found the work that was most interesting there was people who'd been influenced by cultural studies ideas, so media studies.

So, I worked with Jeff Gavin who's at Bath University still, but also Ian Goodwin who's in New Zealand now who was in cultural studies. So, again it's sort of overlap, Jeff's a psychologist and Ian's more cultural studies, but it's the meeting point where it's not the discipline that's important, it's what questions you're engaging with and trying to make sense of, what work you're doing, not quite what the issue is, but that was the interesting thing really. And then what methods can you use really to try and understand what's going on.

[0:51:58]

Lois: Yeah, absolutely. So, I suppose using or doing online research is still fairly new in that sense.

Chris: Yeah, yes.

Lois: And still emerging.

Chris: And very, very difficult. I mean I don't think I ever really got my head around how to do the work or write it up because of the complexities of it. So, in a way, I was sort of retired and, you know? And also, sadly there was a PhD student, Paul Wheaton, a really good researcher, Jemma Lennox, both of whom I was working with on projects related to young people's drinking cultures and social media marketing. And they both had, for personal reasons, had to finish before they'd completed their work. So, I sort of retired early in a way because I could see that the work wasn't going to come to fruition really. So, I think the publications never really came out of that as much as they might have done.

Lois: Yeah, that makes sense. Yeah. Okay. Well, I suppose before we move on to talking a bit about POWES in more depth, I wanted to ask whether there was any one accomplishment or piece of work that you were most proud of that maybe you wanted to touch on.

Chris: Yes. Yes, I was just trying to think about that. I think Feminism, I think the collaboration and the launch of the journal, *Feminism and Psychology*, was really important. And I think... and also the conference, the Women and Psychology conference in 1991, although it was a massive, massive amount of work. I'll never organise a conference again. But it was really different. And I think that was important. And I think *Typical Girls*, writing it up, because it was set up as a parallel to Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*. So, he had three years to do research about young working class men in schools, and then he got another three years to do research about following those young men into the job market. I'd got three years to do both school side and the work, the job market side, but for young women. So, to be only focusing on young women was obviously a radical, an unusual thing to do. It was seen as unusual. And in the context of all this research, and not just in psychology, in education as well, most participants were boys and young men and male college students. So, it was unusual to focus on girls and I got that instantly from people I was interviewing in schools, like the teachers, and the girls. But actually, the teachers were like, "Well, why just girls?" And sometimes it was positive, and I've written about this, for one head teacher like, "I think what you're doing is absolutely brilliant. Girls need encouragement". And one male head teacher in another school was, "Well, I think what you're doing is a waste of time, all these equal opportunities are a waste of time, and most of our girls are going to end up as prostitutes like their mothers".

So, you know, I knew that something was, I was touching a raw nerve by doing it. But Paul had written in order to try and grapple with the difference between the young men, the lads' lives and really complex Marxist theory, he had the book *Learning to Labour* in two parts, and one was the ethnography, and the other was the Marxist theory about cultural penetrations and so on. And I wanted to make the whole of the book, *Typical Girls*, like more integrated and not go into the complex abstract theory, because that's the other thing that was going on in cultural studies and fights between a dominant idea of abstract Marxist theory, which was really hard to understand, and the ethnographers who were more sociologists who we're actually had to battle to make their voices heard a bit. So, I wanted to try and make it an academic book that my friends could read who were not academics.

So, I think that's something I've always tried to do to avoid that really complex language. So, I think that's another thing.

Lois: Yeah, that's definitely important, I agree with you. And just quickly then, kind of how did it feel I suppose for you to almost come up against that wall that you're talking about, about your work being unusual and maybe not accepted as much. Is that something that kind of put you off or...?

Chris: No, it showed me, it was something to try and understand. It was like, "Oh okay". So, in a way I could, I expected to get a response of some kind that was not entirely positive from some male teachers, male academics, and more sympathetic understanding from some of the women I interviewed or women academics. It didn't always split like that, but I expected that.

[0:58:25]

But the thing that I think was most surprising was virulent opposition from some Marxist men over, it took very little to sometimes trigger them you would say now. So, Dorothy Hobson who did research on popular TV, women's consumption of popular TV soaps, we were doing a talk at a conference on

sport and leisure, which would be a sociology, the Leisure Studies Association or leisure studies aspect, section of the British Sociological Association. So, we were doing a small conference in London, and we were talking about women and leisure. So, Dorothy was talking. So, this is what we did in the early 80s in cultural studies. Dorothy was talking about women's leisure, and I was talking about young women being a part of leisure for men, they were like objects for men to consume during their leisure time. But I was just talking about young women's leisure really. So, we were talking about women, and a Marxist guy in the audience leapt to his feet and said, "Well, define the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism," which was not what we were talking about. And I said, "Well, no, that's not what we're talking about".

But what was like the hot potato at the time, this terrible tussle between what is the meaning of patriarchy and how does it relate to Marxist theory and capital. And I said, "Well, that's not what we're talking about". And he said, "Well, you're no better than a Nazi". And really a fascist and this, that and the other. And actually John Clarke, who was there, was supportive and the other ones who'd organised the conference were supportive. But it was even in left groups there was this real touchiness about having, you know, and the single sex girls work was like so touchy to be having a space that was just women. And so there used to be a National Association of Boys' Clubs and a National Association of Girls' Clubs, youth clubs. The National Association of Boys' Clubs in still with us, the National Association of Girls' Clubs at some point in the 50s, I think, or 60s, became the National Association of Youth Clubs, so the girls' clubs and the female only space went. And so, I see those pressures on single sex space for girls and women still around today.

So, they're in a very different guise, but so I think it's that. It's like, "Okay, this is telling me something". And immediately I started writing about it in the methodology book chapters as this is telling me something about the work I'm doing in the project. It might be something you would think it's irrelevant because it's not the data. But it's just as informative, those reactions of people.

Lois: Yeah.

Chris: And they tell you about the discourse and the ideology and the culture around the issue.

Lois: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Okay, that's really interesting. Right, so we'll move on to POWES [Psychology of Women and Equalities Section of the British Psychological Society] then. So, yeah, I suppose do you want to tell me a bit about your involvement with POWES.

Chris: Yes. I mean there were also – of course, I'd forgotten a lot of it. There were all sorts of meetings about, there was a women and psychology group in the UK, and I know Jan Burns was really involved then that, so I'd come across her through that. And there was also linked debates about whether to try and push the BPS to have a women's section. So, there were a lot of debates on whether it was even worth doing. And, of course, some were, and Jane Usher was very involved as well.

So, there were a group of women who were like, "Right, let's..." and Sue Wilkinson was like, and Celia Kitzinger, "Right, let's get them to have a women's section". Which is an important thing to do. I don't think I was bothered about it myself, but I could see the value of it.

So, I think I was involved in those early meetings about whether to do this and how to do it and I was never in the BPS or bothered about it. But I supported the idea, but I thought it was important to have conferences and for some sort of support and so on.

[1:03:47]

Yeah, so I think it was things like that early on.

Lois: Yeah, so, yeah, because that, so that was WIPs, wasn't it, in the beginning and then...

Chris: Yeah. Yes. Yeah, Women in Psychology, that's it, yeah.

- Lois: Yes, yeah. And so, yeah, and so because I know you gave kind of a keynote at last year's POWES conference.
- Chris: Yes, yes.
- Lois: Which was very interesting, by the way. (Laughter)
- Chris: Yes, I was so sorry not to be able to go to the actual conference. It's just not the same.
- Lois: No, it's not, is it?
- Chris: No, but anyway, that's how it panned out. Yes, it was...
- Lois: Yeah, so that was really great. And so, you've been involved in that way as well. And are there any other feminist organisations that you're a part of or...?
- Chris: Yes, I don't really know. I'm just trying to think. I don't think I'm involved in other feminist organisations particularly. I think I came from cultural studies, I sort of re-engaged with psychology in a way, although I go to conferences all over the place, but I wouldn't be in other organisations I don't think.
- Lois: Yeah, I see what you mean. Well, have you seen in your own experience then, have you kind of seen POWES develop over the years at all?
- Chris: Yes. I suppose, well, I haven't regularly gone to POWES conferences, so I've come across a newsletter or things published here and there. So, I don't know that I really know how it's developed in a way because after I did the 91 conference and then went to a couple of later POWES conferences, and they were more traditionally academic, and in a way to me more narrowly psychological and less theoretical. So, I'd come across all this theoretical work to do with structural, post-structuralism, and discourse. And it wasn't there very much in POWES conferences.

And then the other thing I think that happened was discursive psychology started to grow and really became like, "This is the way to do qualitative research in psychology". And so, there were a lot of... and the problem with that for me was that discursive psychologists sometimes were not keen on more ethnographic approaches or interview based approaches were researchers engage with the people they're working with because of their view it's, you know, it's like the data produced by the context and therefore not as useful.

And I've written about, I wrote a... I can't remember what it was called, in Discourse and Society, where I engaged with the discursive psychology social scientist stuff. I mean it's in my CV and I can't remember what it's called. This happened when I was doing the interview on cultural studies as well. Oh, Being There or Being Dead. That's what it's called. So, I was arguing for the importance of being there as well as the discursive psychology approach.

So, just, so that then happened I guess some time in the 90s is a particular approach, discursive psychology approach, just sort of this is, took over a bit and the space for doing the sort of work I was doing, wasn't there sort of in psychology. So, the sort of debates about post-feminism and identity and the ways of doing research which are closer to sociology I suppose, although I don't think they were there in sociology. I was very pissed off with psychology. Sociology have got the BSA conferences. They've got this worship of big theoretical guys, usually from different European countries, there's always one of them. And it's just like, "No, I'm sorry, I can't be bothered with it".

[1:08:52]

So, I tend to be more at home with youth research because they're more interesting. They're less trapped by disciplinary constraints and debates. So, I've sort of, I think I stopped going to disciplinary conferences years ago. And then I started going because I was doing research on alcohol, drinking. I started going to conferences that are just about young people drinking or public health. And they're

really interesting because they are such a stropo bunch, you know. They take on the global tobacco industry, they get death threats, you know? Talk about activists.

So, I just was more interested in those. And I've found disciplinary based conferences which would have been better for my career, to keep on going to the BPS London conference till I died, just boring. So, but then again, I'd got a job and I could do roughly what I wanted to do. I think if you're in an earlier stage in your career it is difficult to do that.

Lois: Yeah. So, I suppose more of those on the ground activist based things that were most interesting.

Chris: Yes, or not even – I don't know that they were activist based. It's more they were based on an issue, a narrower issue, but it was an issue that people were looking at widely. So, people from all over the world and people who were doing academic work and not academic work. So, I think it was that, not just a disciplinary base, like sociology, anthropology, psychology. I think it was that. It was freeing.

Lois: Yeah. And so, do you feel like any of those WIPs conferences or POWES conferences were a space for that as well or did you find those a bit different?

Chris: Yeah, I think the early WIPs and Women and Psychology conferences, because the focus, and this was so new to have this space, just to go to a conference and not be sexually harassed is a big deal. And, yes, so I think it was, the focus was the issue around women in psychology, being women in psychology, how to understand it. The research we were doing, qualitative methods, how to do that work. And then I think there was a shift gradually towards it being, POWES being more of a disciplinary thing, and this is what you do if you're doing a PhD in women and psychology sort of thing. So, to me, they became a bit narrower and very few people were doing the work I was doing. So there as less like – I mean, if I'd have been doing a different topic it might have been different.

Lois: Yeah, I see what you mean. So, I suppose in that sense then a bit more abstractly, do you think POWES, how do you think POWES might develop in future, and do you think that it should kind of maybe develop along a particular path? I mean that's quite a large question.

Chris: Yes, yes, I don't know. I mean I don't know because I'm not so engaged with it in the way that I was. So, I don't know that it's for me to say in some ways. And I'm, yeah, I mean the things I would always say is look beyond the discipline. So, Mick Billig always used to talk about CLR James who was a Caribbean writer, wrote a lot about politics, but also was cricket mad, and Mick was cricket mad. Still is. And he wrote a great book called Beyond a Boundary, which is absolutely fantastic, and I don't know anything about cricket, but it's a great book, about really the history of politics and race and cricket. And CLR James always said what do they know of cricket who only cricket know? And Mick would, you know, say, what do they know of psychology that only psychology know? So, don't be too constrained by the disciplinary boundaries because psychology is a deathly business. Mainstream psychology is horrendous and is showing no signs of improving in a major way.

[1:14:25]

Because, you know, Bath University had a great psychology department that was really small and not ticking all the boxes in terms of the REF {Research Excellence Framework} and whatever, but it has turned into really narrowly experimental and, yeah, a horrible place to work for me and for some of the others who are not qualitative researchers. You know, so psychology, academic psychology, can have a very dead hand in terms of limiting how you think and how you work and how you teach, I think. So, you know, don't let it rot your brain.

(Laughter)

Lois: Yeah, that's interesting. So, yeah, kind of not enough of that criticality in that mainstream.

Chris: Yes, yes, just read beyond, whatever the topic is you're interested in, read history, read sociology, read biology. Read around and look for where the interesting work on that topic is going on because it probably won't be in psychology. But if you engage with the people who are doing the work you're interested in, critical work you're interested in, you'll get somewhere. And it might be going on in

psychology. You don't, you know, but don't feel constrained, I think. But how you do that and manage to have an academic career nowadays, I don't know.

Lois: Yeah. The two things, yes.

Chris: Difficult.

Lois: Clash a little bit, yeah.

Chris: Yeah.

Lois: Yeah, okay. So, just ending off on some feminism and psychology stuff then. What impact do you think feminists have made in psychology so far?

Chris: Yeah, I thought that was a bit of an interesting question. I mean I think compared, to be honest, compared, when I started off it was so narrow in terms of who the participants were in projects, the sorts of arguments you could make, the sort of methods you could use. But that has changed. So, just having, you know, developing a theory based on Bristol schoolboys or American college students isn't enough. And the only explanation for the rabid search for sex differences, although it still goes on, is not the only game in town anymore because notions of sex roles and gender stereotypes and even power relations around gender and sexuality and race and class are still, have come into psychology.

So, I think that's... and it is possible to do, to use feminist ideas in teaching and research in ways that it wouldn't have been before.

So, I think that's, you know, things have changed a lot. But on the other side I think psychology as a whole has really tried to ignore a lot of them, the sort of feminist arguments about methods or theory unfortunately and carry on as before.

Lois: Yeah, so it's almost as though, as you were saying, the mainstream is continuing on and there have been some...

Chris: Yes. Yes.

Lois: ... some changing but...

Chris: Yeah, yeah.

Lois: Yeah, so do you think there's anything else, any key things you think that feminist psychology should be aiming to accomplish in psychology or to change?

[1:18:47]

Chris: Yes, well, I would always be... I've never been one for trying to sort of change psychology really. What I always wanted to do was be able to do the work I wanted to do and that as many others, with others to have the space to do it, because I think if you turn to focus entirely on trying to engage but the dominant paradigm, that will soon exhaust you really. It doesn't mean it's not worth doing because just by doing the work you want to do, you are making a difference. But if you make your main focus, "Right, I'm going to take on the boys or whatever," I think that is a really tough task. So, I think nowadays for feminism and psychology is to keep going and keep building the space and spaces around the world and to make connections and, you know, to think critically and independently really. I think it's keep going and being a supportive and expanding and developing understandings and making links outside of academia as well.

Lois: Yeah, I think that's really, yeah. Absolutely. So, I think that last five minutes has been very advisory towards young feminist psychologists now, but did you have any other key advice that you might give people entering psychology?

Chris: I don't... yes, I don't... I don't think, I think I've said, yes, I'd say make feminism your base, not psychology. And, yes, stick to or find what you want to work on and why. And find collaborators and if you need to make a space to do that, do it. Yes, so I think that that's the main thing. I think the difficulty is doing the work you want to do in a context that's not, that is damaging, you know, contemporary academia is pretty toxic in terms of your health and wellbeing.

So, yes, it's sort of surviving, I think. Survival is resistance. And thinking critically is resistance as well.

Lois: Yeah, that's a great point, yeah. Well, some really useful advice that I will take on myself. Thank you.

(Laughter)

So, yeah, I think that's it in terms of my questions. So, is there anything else that we haven't covered that you'd like to touch on?

Chris: I don't think so. No, I don't think so. I we've sort of covered everything. I can't... I mean I think an issue that I think is really a tough one to engage with is debates about gender and identity now, which are in relation to what does gender identity mean and what do women only spaces mean and in relation to issues around trans which have terribly, become very, very fraught. So, I don't, you know, those sorts of debates happen everywhere, but they certainly are debates for feminists in psychology. But, yeah, but just a tough set of issues.

And also I think what's called intersectionality now is like the gender, race, class, age and disability, how those power, sets of power relations work together and one of the problems for psychologists I think is that we have, because of this way of thinking about gender as if it was nothing to do with class or race and so on, is splitting everything up.

So I'd say that's a challenge.

Lois: Yeah.

Chris: There was one other thing. Oh yes, which I said in the POWES keynote which is I've been using Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson's, they did an editorial to a book called Resistance Through Rituals, which was a very influential youth research book that came out in 78, and they did, in 2006, they did they sort of 30 years on, they did an editorial. And they talk about doing a symptomatic reading in other words, what is happening here when you're doing research. You know, what's happening here? What's it almost a symptom of? What's it reflecting in society as a whole? And which of course for psychologists it's very easy to miss that and just look, "Oh look at these individuals," without seeing them in context.

[1:24:46]

And then what they call the conjunctural analysis which is why is it happening now at this conjuncture and this moment? So, what's going on, which makes you think historically. So, it makes you think politically but more socially, culturally and historically, and I think good psychologists do that, whatever area of psychology they're in. They could be cog-neuro, you know? But that's what psychologists need to do and what psychology as a discipline tries to stop you doing. But if you do it, it'll work out somehow.

Lois: Yeah, definitely. I think that's so important. Yeah, I see exactly what you mean there. That is really interesting. Yeah.

Okay. Lovely. Well, I mean thank you so much for that chat. That was really great. Just to finish off, just for the record, could you state your gender please?

Chris: Female.

Lois: And place and date of birth?

Chris: Oh, I was born in Lancaster, 21st December 1953.

Lois: And current occupation?

Chris: Well, I'm retired, so I retired in 2017 and stopped academic work really, so I thought. I've done my bit.

[..... Discussion on Lois' PhD focussed on domestic abuse.....]

Chris: ... interesting that I started off squatting an old building in Birmingham, this would be 1980, that was going to be demolished to make a private hospital, American owned private hospital, AMI is the name of, I mean the group is all over this country now. They're busy taking over the NHS. So, yeah, so we just went in and squatted the building and moved in some women and children. I mean I wasn't in Birmingham Women's Aid, but I just supported them by going and buying shopping and cleaning up and stuff. And in the end, you know, the council did fund, Birmingham City Council did fund refuges, but it was before that had happened. So, it would have been radical feminists who did that and the same with Rape Crisis, the same sort of group.

Lois: Yeah. I think that's so amazing that.

Chris: Yes, so it's interesting that there's that link.

Lois: Yeah. I suppose that was quite a scary experience as well surely to squat in a building.

Chris: Well, I don't think, I wasn't there when they did the initial breaking in. I think Trisha McCabe probably was. So, that probably was. But it was just empty. It was just empty, and nothing was happening. And the police did turn up. Yeah, so the police turned up to try and remove us. And I think I remember talking to them outside and this sort of older police sergeant saying, "Well, ladies, now who's your leader?" And because we were all women, it sort of undermined their possible rush in and throw us all out. And I can't remember what happened in the end, whether there was eviction or not, or maybe the council stepped in and provided a property. I think that's what happened in the end.

Lois: Right. So interesting.

[End of Transcript]