Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Erica Burman

Interviewed by Lois Donnelly over Zoom™
December 16, 2022

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Interview with Erica Burman

Interviewed by Lois Donnelly

Conducted over the Zoom online platform

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Lois: I'm Lois Donnelly, interviewing Professor Erica Burman on the 16th of December 2022 over Zoom, and we're discussing their life and career in the context of feminism and its history within psychology. So first of all then, would you like to tell me just a little bit about yourself, so in terms of the trajectory of your career and the kind of topics of your work?

Erica: Okay, so I grew up in Liverpool. I'm the child of a sort of mixture of first and second generation immigrants to the UK, who stopped off at Liverpool, willingly or unwillingly. I have a Jewish background, that will figure in my sort of political activities, and, well, I'm 62. I grew up in the 1960s. I benefited from a, I suppose, a girls school system, so it was very acknowledging and supportive of academic achievements, and my family, you know, my mother, in a single parent family as well, that's important, with lots of strong women. And in terms of my career, so I went straight to university from school, and I studied developmental psychology with cognitive studies at Sussex University. So Sussex was a place that had specialised kinds of psychology. I knew I wanted to study, well, I arrived at wanting to study psychology really because I wasn't sure what I wanted. I didn't feel I wanted to specialise in a specific subject, and I had this naïve assumption that psychology would sort of combine all my interests, and that developmental psychology would as well, because you know, it wasn't that I was particularly interested in children, or the sort of…it was more the philosophical and epistemological questions that attracted me to thinking about the origins of growth of knowledge. In that sense, I was in a perfect place, because Piaget was all the rage, and that was, you know, he wasn't really interested in children either, it was the philosophical questions. So I did my first degree in Sussex and I was a very enthusiastic psychologist and social scientist. I wish, actually, that if I hadn't have done the cognitive studies, I would have been in the School of Cultural and Community Studies, because they had schools as well as courses, and because I was doing cognitive studies, I was in Social Sciences. If I'd been in Cultural and Community Studies, I'd have been able to sort of go to lectures, well, have courses with Jacqueline Rose and Gillian Rose and lots of really amazing people. But I mean, I was taught by a very good, some very good tutors in cognitive studies and Social Sciences anyway.

But then I finished my degree, one of my tutors suggested – and I think these moments are very important, actually, aren't they? She said, "Oh, you know, you might want to think about taking a further degree or doing a PhD," and I thought, "Oh." And then she said, "We haven't got any money here but you can always apply and get a place and see." And that led me to think about doing a PhD, which I hadn't. I think I applied for two or three and I got one in Manchester, which was a linked award, and I took that, so that was the first one I was offered, so I took it and I've been in Manchester ever since. And so I was a doctoral student at what was then called the Victoria University of Manchester, and it's now the University of Manchester, and I had a kind of…sort of a…I wouldn't say it was a smooth trajectory as a doctoral student, I can tell you a lot about that if you want. I got, well, I still haven't finished my doctorate, I got… So I'll give you the broad outline first, is that okay?

Lois: Yes.

Erica: I got a teaching post, well a post at what was then Manchester Polytechnic, and in 1986, so I graduated in 1981 from my first degree, I got a doctoral position immediately after, and I suppose I ran out of money in about 1984 and I kind of found other ways to support myself and did other things, but still was nominally doing my PhD. And in 1986, I started working, teaching developmental psychology in Manchester Polytechnic, well, developmental psychology, human development, child development, every course under the sun that, you know, nursing, community work, art education, social work, as well as psychology, that had, you know, because it was a period when there was a lot of…it was called service teaching, and that was very formative educational experience for me.

Lois: Yeah.

[00:06:10]

Erica: And I worked there until, well, I finished my doctorate while working at Manchester Polytechnic in 1990, which was very informed by my experience of teaching really, as well as finding a way to think about the research that I had done in the light of the theories and approaches that were becoming much more available and recognised, like discursive approaches, discourse analysis, post-structuralist, what you might call post-structuralist ideas, Foucault, Derrida, Lacan, etc., all the ideas about changing the subject kind of brought centrally for a particular cohort and generation of psychology postgraduates, that was a key text sort of encapsulated, the ideas and the politically engaged approaches, and that we wanted to bring into our work.

And, yes, so in terms of my trajectory, I worked at Manchester Polytechnic, which became Manchester Metropolitan University, moving from being a lecturer to a professor. I named the chair Psychology in Women's Studies, because by then, I had moved from teaching psychology and developmental psychology to teaching, there was a nominal sort of psychology of sex differences module, that we made the psychology of women. It was when all those things were beginning, and then with other colleagues across the university, we developed a masters in women's studies at that time, that ran for about 10 years or so, and again, that was another very formative experience, because we taught together as staff, and of course, it was a very interdisciplinary and…and I know the moment, because I got the chair in 1998, I think it was, you know, it was when the term 'women' was under a lot of challenge and moving towards gender studies and courses in gender studies, sexuality studies, etc., that I felt it was important to lay claim to something. I'm not sure I would, you know, I'm not saying I would do that now, but that was a sort of significant feminist claim on the specificity of gender positions and relations. So I think that feminist perspective, you know, has become…became more and more prominent, and was also the sort of conceptual, analytical understandings and practical understandings were very much informed by teaching on that masters in women's studies for over 10 years, where I was teaching modules that were both sort of general on sort of feminist epistemologies and practices, but also sort of specific feminisms and psychological practices, and also around feminist approaches to mental health with other colleagues too.

And then in 2013, I left MMU, again, for significant reasons, but was able to get a better position in Manchester University, where I am now, in an Institute of Education, which is kind of interesting because I'd stopped feeling very much a psychologist, or perhaps I'm more of an anti-psychologist anyway, an anti-developmental psychologist, or a childhood studies theorist, because childhood studies has become… I mean, I've got on my desk here, because I just went into the department the other day and picked up two months' worth of post and whatever, and all these journals, there's Theory of Psychology, there's Feminism…there's lots of feminisms in psychology and there's sort of childhood studies journals, and I suppose, you know, seeing them on my desk here, it's quite…well, I need to look through them, it's quite indicative really of sort of the multiple positions I feel I occupy. There are lots of psychologists in education, and paradoxically, I'm now teaching on a counselling psychology programme, because the mid-1990s – and again, it's part of a sort of intellectual and political trajectory that's common to people of I think my cohort and maybe some feminists, and also some earlier who get interested in psychoanalytic theory as a resource, and then think, "Oh, well

how does it work in practice?" So I trained as a group analyst, and although my head of department, bless him, Peter Bannister, kind of said to me, "Oh," when I said could I have some support to do this training, and he said, "No, what relevance does it have to what you do?" Actually, I started teaching on the counselling courses that we were running at MMU, and it's the main bulk of my teaching, and just sort of supporting, as a mental health practitioner, because I'm UKCP-registered through the Institute of Group Analysis. Most of my actual day to day work is supporting this kind of mental health related work, although most of my research interests have been around sort of… Well, now I'm calling it something that I've named 'child as method', as the way in which the construct of children and childhood kind of organises and mobilises and reflects and actively contributes to a range of other interpersonal and geopolitical relations and dynamics. So that's the kind of quick trajectory, is there anything you want to specifically follow up from that?

Lois: Well, I mean, I think I'd definitely like to go back to, as you were saying, kind of maybe that not so smooth PhD journey, that sounds really interesting, yeah, do you want to tell me a bit more about that?

[00:13:00]

Erica: Yes, well, so the award that I got was at the doctoral scholarship, it was the precursor of the ESRC was the SSRC, the Social Science Research Council, and it was a new thing called a linked award. So the candidate was joining a project that the academic supervisory team had devised, rather than bringing their own ideas, and this was on, can you believe it, microprocessors in education. But the people who were running it were sort of actually either computer people or rat behaviourists and they weren't remotely interested in either children or education. So basically, I worked as a research assistant, I did work in schools, I sort of, yeah, and at the same time, at that time, funded doctoral students had to go to conferences, some kind of ESRC postgraduate conferences, and at the first or second of those, you know, you start…some of us constellated together, and I can tell you who those people are and you've probably interviewed some of them, and we, over a period of time, formed a sort of – it was a very cheesy name, 'Circle of Sympathy', but it was a network of support, that was sort of intellectual and personal support, and that was very important. In fact, in a way, I mean, the man I live with I met through that network, Ian Parker. So yeah, I mean, he's written his own kind of intellectual and political biography and I found some programmes for those conferences, and that's not specifically feminist, but there were quite a few feminists as part of that. And that would include Corinne Squire, who I hope you're going to use…

Lois: Not in this chunk, unfortunately, but…

Erica: Okay, and I'm trying to think…there were people who have left psychology, and I think this is something I wanted to bring into this interview, you know, I've always been interested in, you know, feminist psychology is now so institutionalised in a way, and it's been a wonderful thing to see that happen, and I and lots of other people who are now professors, you know, certainly benefited from that tremendously. We struggled, but we've been successful in lots of ways, but you know, one of the things that I was very committed to, and the first book I published was called Feminists and Psychological Practice, which I edited, and I was really committed to having accounts of leaving psychology there, and so I managed to get two friends, two people, Sue Sharp and Jane Jefferson wrote sort of their own accounts of why they left psychology. And you know, it was very significant in terms of gender and, you know, feminist commitments and what psychology didn't do for them and what it didn't offer them in different ways. So I mean, I've benefited from having some of those other kinds of supports that helped us deal with the alienation. Poddy Peerman, who was part of that Circle of Sympathy, left a long time ago and she became a youth and community worker, and she's around Manchester somewhere, feminist activist, certainly. And there was another woman I met at some conference called Diana Clarke, who was one of Cathy Irwin's students, and she left to become…she got active in the women and manual trades movement that was very big at the time, you know, as part of women taking charge, being physically active, doing things for themselves, not just self-defence, but skills.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And she became a joiner. Yeah, so people go in lots of…and her work was really interesting. So the ones who kind of stay, I mean, sometimes there are lots of jokes, aren't there, in universities, about people getting promotions for incompetence, but you know, especially in some sort of managerial positions or administrative ones. You know, sometimes I think, "Well maybe those of us who've sort of stayed, it's not that we've been the really successful ones, it's just the ones who were left who managed to be…" who had the sort of support to be able to weather it really.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And it is possible to see in individual people's trajectories just how they have struggled and how institutional contexts have been very constraining, and I think I was really lucky that I got a job in a sort of marginal educational institution that had some, at the time, you know, Manchester Polytechnic was…it couldn't award its own degrees. I was a Manchester City Council employee, there were equal opportunities policies coming in, around policies for… I mean, it's incredible to think about this now, policies for mature students, women students, black students, disabled students, you know, trying to encourage participation in higher education. So I mean, it wasn't welcomed by many of my colleagues in the psychology department, and you know, often got designated part of the feminist thought police around this sort of being active and in formulating equal opportunities sort of policies, practice, documents etc. But we… I mean, I was lucky to have some supportive colleagues and supportive senior colleagues, as well as this sort of national network that, you know, over time became very much an international network, and I think those things are…

[00:19:50]

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And that then fed in to the specifically feminist networks, but wasn't exclusively so, yeah. So in terms of my own sort of doctoral student trajectory, yes, I did that first year, and discovered that really, the kind of theoretical, conceptual, methodological conversations I wanted to have with my supervisor, you know, just met a bit of a blank. And I don't know, should I name people?

Lois: Yeah, if you want to, and we can always kind of take them out later, it's totally up to you.

Erica: Fine. Well, my primary supervisor was Graham Hitch, who I worked with Alan Baddeley in developing the sort of sketch theory of memory, something like that, anyway, it was worlds apart from my interests. Although I'd become a signed up, enthusiastic psychologist in my first degree, for reasons we'll probably come onto, and I did kind of finish it with a degree of disenchantment and acquiring sort of critical perspectives. And, you know, I knew that, I mean, I might have wanted to do something on sort of, well, I did a project on children's concept of age, because in Piaget's work, that's a much more social concept than time specifically, but obviously it interacts, and I was fascinated by the discussions about time anyway, and I thought it was a way of getting into discussions about power and what would now be called generational orders, but the term didn't exist yet, and certainly to do something qualitative. And yeah, Graham…I mean, bless him, he was also Director of Postgraduate Studies and there was…I have told this story before, but there was a meeting I was supposed to, as every student was, present something about my proposed research at some point in these postgraduate seminars, which, you know, were very badly attended. And the one around Easter break, it was just me and him, and I just sort of talked to him about what I was interested in, and he just sort of said, "Hmm, well…" I mean, I respect the fact that he acknowledged that he had no idea about this, it wasn't his area and he suggested that I found another supervisor, and he even suggested who that might be. Because by that point, I was thinking, "This is not for me, I'm either going to drop out," and the dropout rate for doctoral students, especially full time ones, was and probably still is extremely high, and lots of people around me were sort of just giving up. So I did follow up his suggestion, which was John Churcher, who was at that time acquiring and developing his interest in psychoanalysis, and he did indeed become a psychoanalyst, a Kleinian psychoanalyst, and he actually lives in this road, but I don't see a lot of him. And he was a very facilitative supervisor in the sense that he was, you know, not prescribing what I should do, and certainly encouraging me to read widely, but he is someone who hasn't actually finished his own PhDs, and he has started several, and he was not helpful in enabling me to finish it, I should say.

Lois: Right.

Erica: I think I've learnt a huge amount from the whole process, you know, the whole existential sort of dilemmas, anxieties that I think one inevitably faces in doing a doctorate and the privilege of that position, and the subordinate status. I mean, we also became quite active as postgraduates around the sort of failure to recognise our labour in doing a lot of teaching, although the teaching I did was very rewarding and some of those students I've encountered much later on, who remember the seminars I did with them, and it was really sweet, really sweet. Yeah, and it was of course very useful for me in my future teaching. But where I am now in the Institute of Education at Manchester University, where, you know, there's a whole kind of apparatus of graduate teaching assistants and senior tutors and they're very politically mobilised because they're part of the precariat, precarious casual workers, disposable labour, but we were developing that consciousness as postgraduate students too, but I was part of a… As a postgraduate, I also formed a women in research group in Manchester University, with Liz Bondi, who remains…who is a feminist geographer, she was doing her PhD, well, I advertised in…I don't know, yeah, I think I might have put the ad in the university newsletter thing, and three women responded, and it was just at the time that Liz Stanley and Sue Wise had published that book, Doing Feminist Research, and it was a sort of…became a bit of a bible for us, I suppose, or was a very useful thing to identify with and use, and discuss. And we ran that kind of…we had the research group for, you know, two or three years, I think, although one of the interesting things we encountered… So it was for women, those who identified as women and who were researchers of, I think, across the university, I can't remember quite what range of disciplines. And in the end, you know, we could feel that people were…the women participants were getting a bit protective about their research and didn't want to talk about it, which was a shame.

[00:26:39]

Lois: Right.

Erica: But it was certainly a sort of very formative and consciousness raising activity for me, you know, intellectually, and you know, I mean, I remain good friend with Liz Bondi. The other major person involved, she emigrated or…I can't remember if she was originally from Canada, anyway, she went back to Canada or went to Canada, so we lost contact. So this is all, you know, a long time ago, in the early 1980s. But so, I mean, finishing the PhD, when I started the job at Manchester Polytechnic, I had the material generated, I had done interviews in schools, I had tried to find a way of analysing the material. At that point, discourse analysis, what the term discourse analysis meant was something…it was by Brown and Yule in linguistics, called discourse analysis, there were debates in semantics and pragmatics, you know, I was sort of trying to invent… And there were these debates coming in, Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, about language etc., and I got stuck in the analysis just trying to find ways of analysing materials, and it was only some years later and with the support of other colleagues in Manchester Polytechnic, I would say particularly Ian Parker, you know, and the fact the institutional pressure, because I had a two year temporary job, because it was a political moment when Manchester Polytechnic was, you know, these institutions used to be quite generous, or have an idea about staff development, and the woman I replaced, who had been teaching all the development psychology, was paid to be seconded to train as a counsellor as part of her professional development. So that was a two year course, and I came in to replace her, but in the end, she actually decided not to come back and she returned to the institution and became part of the counselling service, and indeed, head of it for quite a long time.

Lois: Oh, I see.

Erica: So I was on a two year post and I had friends, including Jane Jefferson, who is one of the people who wrote in Feminist and Psychological Practice, she job shared another one year temporary post, and because another member of staff, Carolyn Kagan, who you might know as a feminist community social psychologist, who's a very powerful figure and charismatic in her own way, she went off to train as a social worker. And then, after two years…but it was only for Jane and people like her, these temporary posts required such an investment of time and effort, and it was very, particularly teaching on all these service, the professional courses and the nursing courses, some of them that we encountered a lot of sexism from mature older male students, who found it very difficult being

taught by young inexperienced women. I'm sure we weren't very good, we really weren't very good teachers, some of us, well I wasn't at the beginning, certainly.

Lois: You mean, like, are there any particular examples of that that come to mind as you're thinking?

Erica: I mean, I know, because we were also teaching on four campuses, and I remember putting up in our joint meeting room, sort of staff cubbyhole really, a little piece of paper on the wall with sexist sayings of the day that we would kind of…

Lois: Oh wow!

[00:30:43]

Erica: I can't remember specific ones, no.

Lois: That's so interesting.

Erica: Yeah. And you know, there were some lovely students, but particularly, you know, there was a moment when I think there was pressure for nurses to get degrees, and they were quite resentful for being there and quite resentful to be taught things that they thought they already knew – and a lot of what we had to teach, we really weren't in control of…there was a set curriculum for the nurses, and it probably was really inappropriate and telling them what they already knew in quite a patronising way. So yeah. So you could understand their resistance, but it wasn't pleasant to be on the receiving end. Yeah, so…sorry, what was I saying…oh yes, doing my, finishing my doctorate. So you know, it wasn't…for those people on shorter term temporary contracts, really it wasn't an attractive prospect to stay in the university, and you could understand why they left.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And somehow for me, the fact that it was two years rather than one, and I had the opportunity to kind of see some return on the investment of that terrible…I was so anxious most of the first year, you know, one step ahead of the students at every lecture, because I had a massive, massive teaching load.

Lois: Right.

Erica: Unbelievable compared to, you know, I mean, the polys really did work staff hard.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: But the condition…so a permanent job was then advertised and the condition of that was doing a doctorate, and it was really that that, you know, although I was surrounded by other colleagues who made the same promise and didn't deliver, but I did, and it was the fact that I had to get it that made me return to that work, and by that stage, those theories, those debates had kind of moved that little step further on, that I could understand that the problems that I had been grappling with, personally, were not only mine, and they were not only personal but they were sort of analytical and conceptual, you know, genuine conundrums, and were things that needed to be topicalised in their own right. And so…Valerie Walkerdine was my external examiner, and by that stage, I'd practically got the proofs of my book, well, no, anyway, she'd signed up my book as part of the critical psychology series, Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, which was sort of based on my thesis and also my teaching. But the two, the teaching, the experience of teaching, I mean, partly just sort of getting real and doing something and having to make things sort of a little bit more accessible than going off in my head somewhere, that was very helpful for finishing writing. I mean, I worked very hard, as you do, I mean, to finish a doctorate and do huge amounts of teaching, it's, you know, you never really recover from doing…you know, you become a workaholic by sort of habit then, don't you?

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: So I mean, I kind of learnt a lot from the supervisory hiccups, and one of the things I suppose I've done a lot of now, I've probably supervised nearly a hundred doctorates now, you know, is sort of you know quite a lot about that process.

Lois: Yeah, that's really useful, I'm sure, for your students as well. Yeah, so I suppose, you know, we've been talking a lot about feminism, kind of women's studies and those kinds of groups, those networks that you've kind of built up, I'm just wondering kind of at what stage did your feminist identity kind of develop and when did that really get into your work?

[00:34:58]

Erica: Yeah, good question. So as I said, I grew up in a single parent family, my father died very, very young, and I would say I was sort of brought up by my mum, my grandmother and other family, other women, including someone who was a sort of… I think she'd been a nanny to…my grandmother had six children in eight years, and I guess that my grandparents made a kind of class transition from being, you know, because the original migrant story was, you know, sort of door to door selling, and eventually they got shops, they got, you know, houses, and my grandparents made a class transition, I suppose, sometime in my mum's childhood, where they were able to employ some help.[1] So the third figure in my life was an Irish Catholic woman who I just found out recently from my aunt, who's now about to be 91, that my grandmother had, when my father died, invited her to return and live with my mum, because when my father died, I'm the youngest of three children, and I was not yet born. So that kind of, being surrounded by…I mean, I've written about it sort of for myself, a lot of absent men, there were no father, no grandfathers, actually, just one grandmother, and lots of women who sort of, I mean, my mother felt the stigma of being a single mother very acutely and I think she did encounter a lot of prejudice and misogyny and sexism in lots of ways, but she was also very determined and very strong. My mother died earlier this year, so I've done quite a lot of thinking about all this sort of thing, but you know, it's very much part of my childhood. So gender really wasn't much of an issue, except, I mean, I suppose I can tell the story of…I was sent…being Jewish was like central, I suppose, positioning and identity. I was sent to a Jewish kindergarten and there is a kind of…I have a memory of getting very upset because a boy, the teacher gave the boys a kippah to wear, a little hat, and I said I wanted to wear one, and she said, "No, because you're a girl," and you know… The story that I was able to corroborate around this some time ago is that they got a phone call saying I was screaming and had to come and collect me, and I never went back. I went to school early actually, I mean, I was desperate to go to school because my older sister and brother were going to school and it seemed really interesting, so I actually went to school a term early. So I don't know whether that gender, you know, that sort of kind of very liberal equality kind of issue, you know, clearly it mattered… And in Orthodox Jewish practice, there is great difference in being a girl and a boy, you know, I went to Hebrew classes three times a week, the prizes that the boys and girls got were very different qualities, the watch that you got was very different for a boy and a girl. Yeah, it felt… On the other hand, I had a great time in synagogue on Saturdays chatting with my friends, because there's no part to play overtly, you know, selectively in the service, so there's all sort of paradoxes there.

I went to a non-Jewish school, girls school, I would say it was a good school but it was very meritocratic, and I was one of the few Jewish girls in that school, so it was a very primary identity, I felt. My mother told me I was an ambassador for my people, all this sort of thing, so I mean, it's actually, I think, in many ways the dynamics are very similar to being a young Asian woman, you know, sometime later perhaps. It's very much part of my own antiracist, feminist identification, some practices that, I think I do share some aspects of both, I mean, I have encountered some quite, both implicit and quite direct antisemitism, including, you know, having bricks through my window from the National Front. So yeah…but when I went to university, to Sussex, it was a very…I think, actually, I

[1] Erica: I have tried to recognise and honour the various people, especially women, who cared for me in my childhood, and it is in that spirit I mention the woman who came (back) to live with my then very recently widowed mother, who had been a nanny to her and her sisters and brothers in their childhood. I have done lots of critical thinking and reflection about the exploitative and oppressive features of such caring arrangements, which so often remain unacknowledged and so invisible. These are certainly messy but important nonbiological networks of care and support that cross generations (multiply!), class and 'race', and religion (in this case). But I do want to say this care was vital for me, and I think I would have been a very different (and probably much more disturbed person) without them, and that there was real love involved, as well as much else I'm sure.

didn't realise that it was supposed to be a very left wing and radical place, because I wasn't very politicised. I think I joined…I joined the Jewish Socialist Group, it had a little…and that's an important network, and it remains, or I sort of became aware of it. There's a whole other story about my gendered identify from belonging to, well, the sort of youth groups available to me within the Jewish community, and I've written about this quite recently in a book on post-socialist childhoods, where I was sort of… Because I've been a part of a really interesting project on post-socialist childhoods, and I've been involved, and I wrote something on being on the other side of the Iron Curtain, you know, how did the Cold War kind of impact on my childhood, and the only thing I could think about was the Save Soviet Jewry campaign of the 1970s, and my involvement, and that brought up a lot of issues about my involvement in different youth groups in the community, which, there was a religious one, which I hated because it was very gendered, and the girls, you know, very sort of confining for girls and young women, and the group that I then became very enthusiastic about was the Zionist youth group, because it was like Scouts and it was all active and, yeah, sort of…probably that's one of the places where I, you know, I encountered some socialist ideas and some broadly speaking, well, gender equality ideas. Now, my political trajectory has changed a great deal since that time, as have many of the people who I think were around those groups at that time, but I think it's important to acknowledge that those kinds of organisations… I mean, I think a lot of US feminist, Jewish feminists have written about this as well, that these were very enabling spaces in what could actually be quite a confined community for young women.

[00:42:33]

Lois: Yes.

Erica: So I went to university very much as a sort of self-identified Jew, not particularly religious, but I suppose, you know, connected with that kind of community, cultural, political identity, and that remains, I'm a secular identifying Jew. And in that, I encountered, actually, it was Linda Bellos who was around, mobilising as a feminist in Sussex, I think in social sciences, so she's a black woman who has Jewish heritage, and she formed – I think her father's Jewish – formed a Jewish, I think a small Jewish feminist network, and I joined that. So that was very interesting. I think it was before she became lesbian, but you know, there was a lot of debates going on. And so my route into feminism came as a Jewish, as someone who was Jewish, and that, you know, from an already culturally, politically situated positioning, and it meant that also I felt quite alien from a lot of the debates that were happening at the time in the feminist scene around the maternalist term, the cultural term, all of that, and I suppose I came in in that sort of later strand through what might be called identity politics and single issue campaigns and so on. So that was quite a specific route, it is a strand that, you know, there was a brief few years where there were national Jewish feminist conferences alongside the end of the women's liberation movement conferences, I think they finished, you know, probably in the 70s, before my time, as well as sort of other Jewish socialist and radical Jewish cultural sort of national events. And so I kind of…that was a sort of specific route and positioning that helped me make the links, I think. You know, I think I felt, as a young woman, to identify as feminist actually – and I think this is probably quite recognisable to sort of, these days too – I don't think I really recognised myself as being oppressed, and sort of the position of victimhood or whatever, so to arrive at a feminist identification actually felt like giving up something. I mean, I had a middle class, privileged background, you know, with white privilege and class privilege and materially secure, and I think I was… So individualism had been my sort of place, and to affiliate in a more collective way meant both recognising my privilege but also giving up something of that defence. I think a lot of young people start off being, you know, it's their place of relative freedom or autonomy just to claim an individualist position. Anyway, that's what happened to me, and you know, I think I started to be much more politically aware. I mean, growing up in the household and family that I had, it was very much…I think it was very much a sort of hiding away from political debate, and it took me a very long time to discover that my father had been in the Communist Party, for instance, you know, and I think there was a real sense of sort of hiding and trying, you know, and being good immigrant citizens and not making trouble, which is part of the sort of Anglo-Jewish community positioning, particularly in a marginal community that felt itself to be dwindling and in crisis. You know, it wasn't like one of the very thriving ones in Manchester or London, and in the shadow of the Holocaust and etcetera. So yes, so I didn't have a sort of much kind of political awareness at all about, you know, or exposure to sort of any socialist or feminist ideas really. I mean, I would say my mother was sort

of…would have benefited from a…and she certainly engaged with my ideas when I was able to sort of talk to her about them.

Lois: What happened at university, I suppose and…?

Erica: It happened at university, and, well, I did have some, I would say I was probably quite distressed as a young person, as a young woman, it was certainly gendered, and so, I mean, I did do a lot of reading and I did read, I think it was…I don't know whether it was…well, maybe as a postgraduate, I read things like Our Bodies, Ourselves, and Health and Bodies and all of that, but also a key issue for me was that in my final year, I was harassed, sexually harassed by another student.

[00:48:57]

Lois: Right.

Erica: I mean, it was a very innocent relationship, there was no…it wasn't a sexual relationship, but this guy was obviously…also, I mean, I think there was a connection from our sort of historical distress, I don't know, made him tune into me, but anyway, it got extremely nasty, to the extent that I had to leave the university, I mean, it involved bringing the police, discussions with the police, and I have to say, the police in Brighton were kind of saying, having conversations like…because I was getting really threatening letters, like, I was…I don't think the word 'stalking' kind of existed then, but it certainly would have been that.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And it was interpreting whether a sort of violent language, you know, this kind of formulation constituted a threat to life or not, you know, the most bizarre sort of conversations to have with not very sympathetic police, or, you know, perplexed… And it was interesting seeing the university response, because they just said, "Oh, we've never had…this has never happened before," because eventually, I was sharing a house with someone else on my course and her partner and someone else on another course, and they said, "You must tell…" They were getting terrorised as well.

Lois: Right.

Erica: And actually, I mean, I think one of your questions is about sort of mental sort of things, and I went and told my personal tutor, Julie Rutkowska, who is a cognitive scientist and she became professor and everything, and it is to her utter, you know, I mean, credit, and I'll always be grateful, you know, she just believed me.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And not only did she believe me, but when I was, because the police and the university managed to talk to each other, they advised sending me away while this guy was kind of being told off and they were worried it would all escalate, and I did go and stay with my sister in London for a bit, I think, and then I came back, and Julie was going on sabbatical, and offered for me to look after her house and her two gorgeous cats. And so the last months of my undergraduate degree were sort of in this lovely house in Brighton looking after cats. And when I think about it, it's just such an incredible thing to do, you know, I've just had former doctoral students and, you know, academic colleagues staying in my house while I've been away on and off, but for an undergraduate student, to do that, I mean, to materially support, as well as, you know, academically and institutionally, it was extraordinarily important, and I don't think I've ever told her how important it was, but we did remain in contact and she did write my references too for my jobs, so, yeah. And I should say, I did, I mean, in terms…so as I said, I'm someone who came from a very unpolitical kind of…or depoliticised kind of background, so the politicisation, in a way, had to come through the study, that was a legitimate arena for me to… So I think I probably read, there were, you know, first read about Marx in something on Piaget, can you believe it? And there was…and Julie Rutkowska and Stephanie Thornton, who were the tutors in social sciences, they ran a course called the biological and psychological bases of sex difference, or something, so you know, that was a way into some of those discussions, which was important.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And also as a doctoral student, I shared an office with someone who was doing an MSc in child development, and there weren't many students, so I sat in on lots of those courses, and one of the people teaching was a woman called Elena Lieven, who is a feminist developmental psycholinguist, a very important one, but she ran a course…what was it called, something on sexualities, but was also tremendously valuable for me, both personally and then subsequently through all my teaching.

[00:53:48]

Lois: Yes.

Erica: So those kind of…the intellectual experiences and exposure, the personal ones, I mean, I think it took a long time to process what had happened in my final year and understand it as not something wrong with me etcetera, but it certainly retrospectively, you know, it made me feminist, you know, it made me realise I had common cause with other women.

Lois: Yes, that's so interesting, isn't it, that kind of, yeah, definitely that personal kind of feeding into that. Yeah. Okay, well great. So shall we perhaps move on to kind of talking about your work more specifically? So I was thinking whether you have any kind of particular piece of work or accomplishment that you're most proud of?

Erica: Oh, this is really difficult, because these things move as you, you know, go through. It's…And mostly one is most interested in the thing after the thing you're currently doing, what you're doing next, you know, in terms of the structure of desire. So, I mean, I'm proud…what was the question, what I'm most proud of? Or…

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: I mean, lots, well, lots of different things in different ways, because I mean, that book, Feminists and Psychological Practice, that I didn't even write a chapter in, I mean, it was a wonderful and…Sue put it into the Feminism and Psychology series, it was…I got loads of letters from women saying, "Oh, it's so wonderful to see this, it's really helped me," yeah, and we had some events, you know, around it, so that was really great. The book, Deconstructing Developmental Psychology has been a bit of a kind of surprise bestseller, and kind of remained…in fact, they've just asked me if I'll do a fourth edition, and I kind of… And I feel a bit, well, I shouldn't sort of take for granted sort of the…I'm deeply grateful that, in a way, I was lucky that it did something that we all knew was important and I'm grateful that it's being used, but I don't think it's actually now, my best work at all. But I think it was important, and I suppose it's what I'm most known for. Actually, the work in my book Developments is more sort of…I think it's more interesting in lots of way, I mean, partly because, you know, I don't see… I mean, sometimes, I'm a member of the Development Psychology Section of the BPS, but you know, I don't think people would see me as a developmental psychologist, sometimes I claim that label, but I'm certainly more of a feminist anti-developmental psychologist and anti-psychologist. But sometimes it's important to claim the identity of your psychology, isn't it?

Lois: Yes, absolutely.

Erica: For strategic reasons. As part of that feminist sort of friction, in and out of the discipline, that I think is so important. But actually, I would say that some of the sort of collective or joint work I'm most proud of, I mean, as a sort of personal achievement, I mean, we wrote two books in the late 1990s, Challenging Women: Psychology's Exclusions, Feminist Possibilities, and another book, Psychology of Discourse Practice, it was with some of the same feminist authors, but with some men as well. And they were really important experiences in co-authorship and co-editorship and mutual commentary. And then a series of research projects that were around the theme of domestic violence and minoritisation, I think, you know, from the early 2000s, that bring together ideas of interpersonal violence and sort of systemic and structural violence of immigration control, as well as the sort of institutional racism in the systems, were very important for me… I think politically, it was an expression, my intellectual work, my academic work and research has always tried to straddle

and sort of have an activist angle intervention, but that's probably among the most – and my mum used to say, "Oh, when are they going to do…when is it all going to change as a result of this piece of research?" and I would say, "Oh, I don't know." But at least we were documenting good practice and bad practice, and barriers, and creating new kind of analyses to think about that intersection between race, class, gender and sort of citizenship or the lack of.

Lois: Yes.

[00:59:22]

Erica: And benefiting from particularly the kind of work that was coming out from Southall Black Sisters, and Women Against Fundamentalism, which, all of that work remains incredibly important. And the sort of networks, I mean, the colleagues, now, the colleagues that, you know, some of the colleagues that I worked with on those projects, I think Khatidja Chantler is now doing amazing work around domestic homicides and, you know, all kinds of things that attracted a lot of media attention, so…and I think is making a lot of…managing to make the kind of interventions that…I was always very sceptical about policy actually, and trying to change policy, but I was educated by her, so I'm kind of quite proud of some of that work. I think, you know, in terms of being valuable. But in terms of my own kind of intellectual contribution, I suppose a book I wrote on Fanon and Child as Method was, I feel is the most sort of…pushed me the most and is the most sort of rigorous and coherent and stretched…yeah, I think it's an interesting, almost completely unreviewed in psychology and education contribution.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: But, yeah, I would say that it's really the sort of…so much joint work, in a way, and I think it's important to try and make that more visible.

Lois: Yeah, absolutely. And so, I suppose, you know, throughout your work but particularly in kind of the deconstructing developmental psychology and the more recent book around kind of Fanon and stuff, how do you kind of integrate your feminist values into those, you know, how does that work?

Erica: Well, although Deconstructing Developmental Psychology, I mean, it used the deconstruction term, but I mean, in its subsequent editions, it became a bit more deconstructionist, but it was touch and go what we were going to call it actually, and it's certainly not a Derridean deconstruction kind of thing. It was, and is, a feminist critique of developmental psychology and I think that's what it needed to be and what it remains, and it was built from my teaching as well as my research, but principally from my teaching around children and childhood, and especially with the mature students, especially the women health professionals who kind of – and I think I've written about this in the introduction to the books, I wrote something – but you know, they showed me…they both, it became manifest what those practices do, particularly to women, but to sort of subjugated groups, racialised groups, working class, you know, there's the whole normalisation, stigmatisation, pathologisation that is encapsulated in everything to do with children and childhood, and I think that's why I'm finding childhood studies a kind of – although it has its own problems and isn't always feminist, and some areas of education studies sort of are more receptive to these arguments than psychology, that has an attachment to normative development is very strong, I think, in psychology and very difficult to, well, I mean, I think it's probably impossible to dismantle, it's more about seeing why one….what the attachment is and when one can try and destabilise it enough to allow other perspectives in. Yeah, so while the Fanon work ostensibly doesn't look very feminist, Fanon wasn't feminist and there was a lot of misogyny and homophobia in some of his writing, but you know, there were major feminist engagements with his work, and I think it's, you know, and Sylvia Winter's work is now kind of, like, seen to be a sort of feminist recuperation of Fanon's work, and her ideas are gaining a lot of traction. But yeah, I suppose for me, that brought together some of the central interests that I had about the relationship between personal and political change, which is a feminist concern as well, and that kind of…that understanding of emotions and learning and change that comes through in sort of both education and sort of psychotherapy. So I mean, I see it as a feminist engagement with Fanon, but it's not just a feminist, overtly feminist text. But I would, I mean, the current work that I'm doing is sort of, which is taking up the child as method kind of perspective, is certainly informed by… Because I think, you know, feminist debates have changed such a lot, and I think they're not…they're much

more integrated and engaged with post-colonial studies, with sexuality and queer studies, and it's really not possible to sort of, or desirable, I think, to sort of say, "This is feminist debate in this kind of thing," for very important political reasons, yeah.

Lois: Yeah, absolutely, so it's almost kind of key in the way that you engage with everything?

[01:05:58]

Erica: Yes, I mean, certainly I, you know, I left the Jewish Socialist Group because I thought, because of their gender politics of relating, you know, I left the Labour Party because, well, I mean, that's just an awful place, but sadly, very sad…but you know, I'm not involved in sort of…I'm more involved in sort of, or support a little bit, not enough, some campaigns and issues, but you know, the sort of whole crisis around what is, you know, the category of woman and its exclusions, not before time, I mean, I already felt that in my own trajectory that feminism didn't speak to me as a Jewish young woman, you know, with its very generalist, homogenised concerns, and as someone who identified as from a minoritized background, albeit with many privileges. So I think I try…even now I supervise a lot of work around gender and sexuality studies, I have done, I remain doing that, although it doesn't appear to have many institutional outlets these days, certainly not…I mean, there is elsewhere in my university, not just sexuality studies, but you know, I'm a bit out of touch with what's happening in psychology really.

Lois: Yeah, that's interesting. I suppose as well, you've done a lot of work around kind of creative use of methodologies as well, can you maybe tell me a bit about how that's developed over the years?

Erica: Oh, well, sure. Well as I said, when I was doing my doctorate, you know, I had to kind of create the analytical approaches from the debates and tools that were happening, and again, that was informed by the Circle of Sympathy network, and other…

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And then, I suppose Ian Parker and I, we formed the Discourse Unit in 1990 at Manchester Polytechnic, this was a place to support students doing qualitative, and at that point, undergraduate students doing qualitative work, because they were getting attacked by other colleagues as, you know, not proper research etcetera.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: It kind of grew from there, but we always had a broad understanding of discourse, and that remains with me. You know, we had lots of discussions and relationships with the other discourse groups that were sort of eventually formed at Loughborough and elsewhere, and now it's a term, well, we've had lots of students who, including international students who've gone to lots of places, so it's really very much an international network. I mean, there was a significant moment, and I think various of us have written about this, where discursive approaches or discourse analysis really was the feminist approach to research.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: It was…they were completely identified together, and there was a…when was it, 1990 or something, a day conference organised on feminism and discourse, part of which I think Sue drew upon to do that book, Sue Wilkinson. So I mean, I think it was a bit of a shock to some of us, that discursive work didn't appear to be very feminist, to be honest. But I still think, you know, it's a form of critique, and you know, if you're critiquing or questioning the dominant order, then it's feministic, and lots of other things as well, you know, it might be antiracist etcetera, you know, class analysis. So that's what drew me, you know, we needed the tools to do the critical work to question the prevailing social arrangements, and discourse, I mean, qualitative research was sort of beginning, and feminist methodologies and feminist research in the late 1970s and early 1980s came into psychology a bit later, some of us seized it and brought it in. And you know for a while, discourse sort of got a bit sort of reified, I think, in psychology, as although there are many approach, you know, what's called discourse analysis, or what was called discourse analysis in psychology was just of bog standard

close reading in humanities. So you know, it's the typical psychological fetish around method, to sort of have to systematise etcetera. So I have quite a flexible approach to discursive, discourse analysis or, you know, even the terminology, as you can see.

[01:11:38]

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And for me, you know, it depends on the questions people are asking, who they…what they're interested in, what the text is they're analysing, and I mean, I don't exclusively supervise or even do myself sort of discursive work, but I suppose it was part of my, yeah, it was certainly an important strand of my work historically and part of, yeah, what I've written about as a methodologist, along with feminist research and a little bit around sort of the participatory, some of the debates around participatory work etcetera, and interviewing… Even the very early days of thematic analysis, this book that Peter Bannister put together, which we wrote, you know, Qualitative Methods in Psychology, which I think, because Peter was very…was the Head of Department and was very…he was big in the BPS, even before he…and also in the Open University, so it became an Open University set book, this book, Qualitative Research and Psychology, and I wrote the chapter on interviewing, and on the feminist research. And you know, the interviewing, the bit on analysis is just attached to the, you know, the stuff about interviewing dynamics. I do have a statement about what the thematic analysis is and how you do it, in a section on how you do it, and an example.

Lois: Yeah, oh good.

Erica: So yeah, I mean, we had to be methodologists, as well as theorists, because we had to…partly because of what psychology is as a sort of a training in methods, and also to help people do the work that we wanted them to do. So it was a sort of accident, but yes, you know, it became a major part of my work.

Lois: Yeah, part and parcel, I suppose.

Erica: Yeah.

Lois: Okay, well, if we go on now then to talking a bit more about POWES, if that's okay. So if you could just tell me a little bit maybe about your involvement with the Psychology of Women and Equalities Section of the BPS [British Psychological Society]?

Erica: Well, I can't give you, you know, dates and absolute sort of… I mean, these histories are often very contested, I know, and highly charged, but I haven't checked my documents, so I'm going to give you general impressions of how I remember them, you know, as someone who was actually…thinks a lot and writes quite a lot about memorial accounts, you know, I suppose is the only way I can do it.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: But my sense is, in remembering it, thinking about it, is that I was, you know, maybe at one of these postgraduate conferences or something, I came across Jan Burns, and a few other people and we decided to form an organisation called Alliance of Women in Psychology, out of which POWES came. So there was…and for a while, they were parallel organisations too, so the idea was, you know, that feminists…you know, it was the days when there were women's therapy centres, I think they've all closed now sadly, there were…and there was a lot of feminist activism going on elsewhere, and feminists in sociology were organising, they had a corpus, other disciplines, so the kind of whole women's liberation feminist movements were sort of…people were bringing them in to try and challenge and transform key disciplines that were central to maintaining gendered oppressions actually, like psychology. And so, I mean, I think we had some national get togethers, regional/national, and the thing with the Alliance of Women in Psychology was that it was…we wanted it to be, or it was formed of people who were affected by psychology, women who were affected by psychology, it wasn't an academic organisation and it wasn't only composed of people in academic positions – and this is really important for that history, I think. And we wanted it to be part of…I mean, there were other kind of movements going on about sort of service user, sort of radical

psychology things happening, that did continue to happen as well, in various situations. But eventually, the Alliance of Women in Psychology, sort of people in it, and by this stage, after a while, it would include people like Sue Wilkinson and others, that the decision was taken that it would be worth, I mean, but it was a hard decision and thought about a lot, that it would be worth going for institutional recognition within the BPS to form a section.

[01:17:34]

Lois: Right.

Erica: And that's…and so POWES grew out of that, of a wider network that included people who were in other, you know, working in other disciplines or feminist and also maybe, you know, were receiving some psychological services, who had quite a bit to say about things. The other thing that was important is that in both AWP and POWES, in the early days, there were a lot of practitioner psychologists, you could say, a lot of educational and clinical psychologists, who were really committed and very active in the sort of making…in formulating strategy and what should happen. It is, you know, a very saddening thing to see how part of the dynamic of POWES is that it became more and more difficult for those educational and clinical people to actively participate because of the demands of their work, and we saw this, we had a gendered analysis of this in terms of mental and manual labour, and whose work gets valued, but you know, it was always the case that even graduate students, let alone staff in academic, you know, in universities, were able to find the time or be supported to have the time to do the work in committees and whatever.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: But I mean, in Feminist and Psychological Practice, this book I had, as well as I think I've got chapters on clinical psychology, but there was a chapter by some educational psychologists, and in the end, it was a very interesting chapter, but they pulled it at the last minute because they were worried about, even though it was going to be anonymous, they were worried about being identifiable in naming various things that they had wanted to criticise. So that was quite traumatic and very difficult but quite indicative, I think. So POWES kind of grew out of the wider network of feminist activism, you could say, and then it became increasingly difficult, you know, and then all the, you know, well known issues around the compromises around the name etcetera. You know, for a while, the conferences were joint between the Alliance of Women in Psychology and the Psychology of Women Section, so that it would be possible to invite a broader range of people and support them to come, and you know, it is within my memory that, and it's not that long, not a tremendously long time ago that Jan and I stopped being signatories on the Alliance of Women in Psychology chequebook.

Lois: Gosh.

Erica: But you know, it had been moribund for a long time really, because all the work, you know, the effort of setting up the section basically sucked all the energy out of the Alliance of Women in Psychology. It's a kind of, you know, you could have predicted it as a sort of what would happen as an institutionalisation, and a casualty really of getting that kind of accreditation. And I still think that the Alliance of Women…I mean, there's a role, they're really…we are desperately in need of arenas where both providers and users of services, kind of especially feminist ones, talk to each other, and feminists in psychology and feminists, you know, academics and other disciplines talk to each other. Those were tremendously fruitful discussions that became, you know, gradually closed down, I suppose, in that process. So I was involved in, I wouldn't say, maybe not the very, very beginning, but quite early on, yeah, and then I was there in the first few conferences. I think I've sent you the poster from the founding conference, or it's in the archive.

Lois: Yes.

[01:22:05]

Erica: And yeah, it was wonderful, and you know, some of those people like Poddy Peerman, I think she was very active in the Alliance of Women in Psychology and other people, and we hadn't, you know,

it was a struggle and it felt like it was valuable sort of doing these kind of feminist interventions, and you know, really we had no idea, I had no idea anyway, that it would ever get seen as a good thing, you know, or that I would benefit. You know, because most of us had actually, if you like, been disadvantaged by that kind of level, you know, by political engagement in these questions, and it's a whole other scene now to be advantaged or supported, you know, there's been such a radical transformation in…

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And it's a great success story, both, you know, both for the discipline, for POWES, for those of us who have benefited hugely actually, but speaking for myself, much to my surprise, yeah.

Lois: So what year was that, did you say, sorry, that was the beginning of the AWP?

Erica: Well, I think…was it…if I could just look at the poster out there for a moment.

Lois: Yes, that's fine.

Erica: I'll be back in a minute. Well, as ever, there's no year on it.

Lois: Typical.

Erica: There's everything else, you know, the time, the date, the organisers, Jan Burns, Mat De Jong, who I think went back to the Netherlands. I think it was 1985.

Lois: Okay.

Erica: I think it was. But the first conference, and with Dale Spender and Maria Tolley, a feminist singer-songwriter. Yeah, so that was, you know, the first few conferences were joint. Sorry, what was your question again, the year?

Lois: Yeah, just the year, so around then. So yeah, and so, you think really a benefit that POWES became an official kind of, I suppose, organisation within the BPS?

Erica: Well, you know, I think it's, you know, it's very difficult to say because once you…we knew, you know, some of us, we were just very clear that it, you know, there were going to be costs as well as benefits to go for institutional recognition.

[01:26:09]

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: I mean, you become part of that institution, you… So you know, I think, and psychology is a very elitist and exclusionary sort of profession, isn't it?

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And you know, I felt very committed to trying to maintain those outward facing links, even when I became chair of POWES, I was sort of persuaded into it at one point, to try and open up the channels, both between, you know, academic and professional psychologists and other disciplines and other organisations. But you know, you knew, I knew that this would probably happen, that it would become more and more sort of rarefied, and you know, running the risks then of deradicalization, incorporation, recuperation etcetera, you know, in order to function in and to fill in the application forms to get the money, you know, whatever, of course it involves some compromises. But we had very explicit discussions about those risks and, you know, but also the costs of not, well, the desire for recognition or acknowledgement or to create a space for feminists and feminisms in psychology to change psychology, it had to happen from within, I think, as well as, it wouldn't have happened only from without.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: And I think the challenge now is to maintain the relations between inside and outside.

Lois: Yeah. That's right. So you mentioned there being chair of POWES, what was that like for that period?

Erica: It was, well, I haven't played a huge…I mean, since the early days of helping form the section a little bit, I mean, I wasn't a major player, I have to say, because I was more interested really or committed politically to the Alliance of Women in Psychology, but I did play my bit and I went to conferences… So I kind of came into it because I was persuaded by Rose, I think, and I found, I mean, it was extraordinary to see what POWES has become and feel, you know, I don't know what my particular contribution was, I tried to, you know, support links between psychology and other disciplines and I think I tried to make sure we didn't only have events down in London or in Cumberland Lodge, because you know, beautiful and amazing and cost effective as Cumberland Lodge is, you know it's not everyone's cup of tea, so to speak, and it's sort of colonial kind of class image, even though that's one of the great attractions as well, I think, to have that experience.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And, yeah, I mean, I think…I got caught up in an earlier moment when I was giving a keynote account at POWES about the history and quite a lot of sort of quite vicious sort of dispute around who kind of owns the history and…I thought at the time I was just saying some very obvious things about how, you know, the people who tell the stories tend to be history's winners, and there are always other stories, and that got…I don't know, it got misinterpreted or people felt they were left out. And as a result, kind of people witnessing, other participants of POWES witnessing that, I think there was a big commitment to sort of try and make POWES…and partly also – this is a separate issue, and it was earlier, the division between POWES and what was called POLS, the Psychology of Lesbians Section, which has become the Sexualities Section, which I'm also a member of – that, you know, some of that, I think, got unnecessarily difficult. There then became a great commitment to make the POWES conference a really supportive, inclusive place.

Lois: Yes.

[01:31:07]

Erica: And I think a lot of work went into that, and I don't think, you know, that was done without me, I was sort of not being active in POWES particularly at that point. But I think that was a great achievement. I would say now that, you know, I think we do need to have some debates, they won't always be comfortable, and you know, coming now as sort of in an education department where there's all this discussion about pedagogies of discomfort and so on, particularly around the sort of ways of challenging, I suppose, colonialism and other forms of exclusionary elitism that…you know, inevitably, POWES must reproduce. It's going to be, you know, we can't but do that and the question is what else we try and do.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: So the experience, I mean, you know, I had a very supportive committee and I found it a bit odd to be in such a sort of mainstream position and I don't think of myself as a leader particularly, but I did think that we had a good team, and I hope that some of the initiatives or ideas that I tried to bring remain percolating through. I think, you know, in terms of my own sort of academic trajectory as someone who isn't… The whole thing about feminist psychology being seen as part of social psychology, just being someone who wasn't a social psychologist, I had never studied social psychology, you know, I think that's a little bit important to have a broader perspective on psychology and not be siphoned and ghettoised into one little area. But you know, the POWES conferences have been sort of very wide-ranging now, aren't they, and very creative and interesting.

Lois: Yes, hopefully.

Erica: Yeah.

Lois: And I wonder, kind of, so I suppose you've seen POWES develop, particularly maybe in that sense of kind of trying to be more supportive. Do you think it's developed in any other particular ways, or do you think it should be developing?

Erica: Well, I think, you know, there's people like Rose and Sue and others who've got into all the BPS committees, I mean, the whole thing about getting feminist psychology on the curriculum or, you know, legitimated, and qualitative and kind of discourse work, I mean, it's always going to be a struggle, it's an ongoing project, because the dynamics of the institution will always, and the discipline, will always be to try and erase that.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: So there have been huge, you know, institutional achievements, as well as sort of…and those are the good things about being recognised as being part of the discipline, as well as all the challenges of sort of how do you resist that just incorporation and the individualisation process, or get recruited into a liberal sort of apparatus of accreditation, you know, that forgets the broader systems of inequality that psychology, as a discipline, is very much a part of. You know, it's not uniquely responsible for it, but it's a really key one in what stops… I mean, there's a radical psychology where I hope we could envisage what psychology must be part of, emancipatory theories and practices, some kind of…we need some theory of subjectivity and change, along with everything else. But we have to keep being part of those kinds of discussions in social theory, feminist, queer, post-colonial, whatever, and you know, not only work in psychology, I think, as a psychologist, anti-psychologist.

Lois: Yeah, so more like interdisciplinary stuff and outside of psychology as well?

Erica: Yeah, yeah.

Lois: Yeah, okay, that's…

Erica: And not only university work as well.

[01:36:05]

Lois: Yeah, yeah, of course.

Erica: I mean, it was very interesting doing these projects on domestic violence and minoritisation, I mean, the fact that I was a university professor, I was a full professor by that point, I wouldn't say that was an advantage. The fact that I could claim to be a mental health practitioner, you know, I had the training, and so talking with social workers or refuge workers, domestic violence refuge workers or whatever, that at least I had some other kind of hat that sort of mitigated the elitism of the sort of university positioning.

Lois: Yes, that's really useful, good point. Yeah, and I suppose, I'm just wondering, you know, that kind of difficult conference, perhaps where you were doing your keynotes, how did that kind of impact your engagement with POWES kind of after that, if at all?

Erica: Well, it was completely unexpected and I felt quite hurt, and I felt…I think I was still part of the Feminism and Psychology editorial board, and I sort of had my knuckles rapped as well, you know.

Lois: Right.

Erica: I was sort of…well, I can't recall, I don't think I went off in a huff, I was sort of deeply sort of…I suppose the thing is that other people were probably more shocked than me. I mean, I had…I didn't talk about it or draft the paper lightly, so I had thought a lot about it and I thought I'd written it as diplomatically and in a way to not individualise or personalise as much as possible. But I suppose

what it showed me is that, you know, people will take things personally, even though I really didn't intend that, and I did want to comment on institutional dynamics that we all participate in, but if people don't share that framework of - we all participating, then they will take it personally, I suppose.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And I mean, I don't think I sort of went off in a huff and thought, "Oh, I won't have anything to do with POWES," because other people were sort of…I mean, I don't think I would have done anyway, but other people were sort of really doing something with this, what was happening. And perhaps it opened things up quite fruitfully really, I don't know. And so, it's just I suppose I was probably getting involved in lots of other things at the time too.

Lois: Yeah, no, that's great. Sorry, I am aware that we've kind of run over time, are you still okay to…?

Erica: I'm okay, but I don't want, you know, I don't know about you?

Lois: No, I don't want to keep you talking too long. But yeah, alright then, so I suppose we'll change gears a little bit to talk about feminism and psychology more broadly. So what impact do you think feminists have had in the field so far, and what do you think there is still to be done?

Erica: Oh well, I don't think I've got a lot to say on this question really. I mean, I think we've…it's hard to say, isn't it, because in a way, lots of things don't call themselves feminist anymore that probably are informed by or engaged with it, and so it's harder to point to something and name it as feminist. And you know, that's because of the sort of…yeah, the sort of recognition of the need to be more feminist, you know, it's not a single, well, if it were understood as a singular sort of positioning, then it would be very unhelpful and exclusionary. So I think that, you know, psychology is a very different discipline now than it was when I started studying in it, and so there has been huge impact and awareness, there's been a lot of social change generally. So I don't think, you know, feminist activists in and outside psychology can really lay claim to be responsible for all of that. But I mean, I think the lesson there is that we are, you know, we might think that we're making a lot of changes, but actually, we're just, you know, responding to or riding the wave of things that happen elsewhere. But you know, psychology is a much more receptive discipline for feminist ideas than it used to be. I don't underestimate the level of resistance and the various forms of backlash, there are certain loads around and there's loads of political challenges generally; look at what's happening with abortion etcetera. And so, you know, it will never be a completed project until… And the history will always be at risk of being erased, which is why it's good you're doing this, and it's, you know… But I feel that, you know, I've participated in quite a small way, but lots of people have sort of got much more involved than me in sort of kind of changing the nuts and bolts of the organisation like the BPS and its equivalent in other countries. I mean, I'm just not someone who can bear to do a lot of that.

[01:42:19]

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And you know, I'd rather be sort of formulating the arguments for not doing so, and keeping them alive too, in a friendly way. And I hope that, you know, one needs those dialogues in and outside and between institutions.

Lois: Absolutely.

Erica: Yeah. So that was a question about, well, how successful is… I mean, yeah, there have been dramatic changes, but it's hard to know what we could measure it against, so to speak.

Lois: I suppose that's true, yeah. Yeah, so hopefully, yeah, still some more changes to come.

Erica: Well, yes, the work is not…will never be done, will it? And you know, now I work on the counselling psychology programme, and that whole thing about sort of, "Where are the men? We need men?" etcetera, and that whole thing about women studying psychology and… I remember from decades

ago, "We need more male undergraduates, blah, blah," you know, so it gets, you know, the same…a lot of the things are the same as well as different, aren't they?

Lois: Yes, yeah, that's very true actually. Some good changes, but still some kind of same narratives, I suppose, happening.

Erica: Yes.

Lois: Yes, okay. So lastly then, what advice could you give to feminists or activists entering psychology now?

Erica: Oh, gosh, that's really hard. Well, this is not a comment about POWES, but more about my sort of academic, my professional experience more generally. Don't put your faith in institutions, don't identify with institutions, or don't only identify with institutions. Institutions aren't loyal, it's the people in them that are or aren't. So I think it's about building networks, alliances, that I hope that, you know, feminists who already feminist identified coming into psychology, they need to stay feminist, and to do that, they can't only be feminist in psychology. Psychology is not, you know, it's possible now to be a feminist psychologist, but that should always be, given the sort of levels of oppression and inequality around, and the elitism of the institution, a very tense position of navigating the feminist identifications and activisms outside the discipline, and in. And you know, I really respect some colleagues, doubtless people you've interviewed for this project who put huge amounts of energy into making the discipline and making the British Psychological Society and other sort of national psychology organisations much better places and doing much better work, and you know, I'm so grateful that they did that, because I know that I wouldn't have been able to stomach it for so long. You know, I did my time going to some of those committees and I supported a lot of initiatives but really I think my own…my preferences and my strengths lie in trying to keep the communication and the links open to sort of keep us a bit on our toes, and that's not always comfortable, as I said, and accountable to feminists outside psychology, you know, feminist-identified people who probably do lots of other things as well.

Lois: Yeah.

[01:46:53]

Erica: Yeah, and so, we shouldn't put all our eggs in the institution's basket, that's the way to…that's a recipe for complete depoliticization and incorporation, as well, I'm sure everybody knows that, but there are times when maybe you have to do it for a bit, but don't forget that we, in feminists in psychology are benefiting from the activism from outside.

Lois: Yes, absolutely, that's a lovely point. That's great. Okay, perfect. So is there anything else that I haven't mentioned that you'd particularly like to cover, either about yourself or about feminist psychology?

Erica: I'll probably think of loads of things when we stop the call, you know, that's what happens at the end of the recording experience, isn't it? I think we've covered quite a lot. I mean, is there anything further that you want to sort of follow up from my rambles around?

Lois: Yeah, I suppose the only thing that I was thinking of maybe heading back to was kind of that idea around maybe your disenchantment at the end of your undergrad and sort of then starting to go into the critical stuff. Kind of how did that happen?

Erica: How did that happen? Yeah, well, I think I found other people to talk to who could give me ways of thinking and a language for what seemed like sort of strange and stupid things. I mean, I discovered I didn't like statistics very much, doing my undergraduate course, and we didn't actually have to pass an exam in statistics, and my project, my undergraduate project had a chi squared in it.

Lois: Very exciting.

Erica: Yeah, but I…and I think it kind of occurred…so I think by the time I'd finished the degree, the undergraduate degree, I was still a sort of pretty signed up developmental psychologist and cognitive scientist, and through the cognitive studies actually, I didn't really get on with programming that much, but the philosophy of mind was very helpful, and we had courses in epistemology in the first year, so those were really, really important, and remain really important for me, as exercises in critical thinking and all the debates about mind, body, dualisms and everything, it was all part of what we were dealing with, studying and thinking about the human computer metaphor and interaction etcetera. And the developmental psychology was very much engaged with that, so I mean, I think a lot of it is very interesting, but I remain very, you know, I came out of that degree very sceptical about what computers can do actually, a very healthy suspicion really about them. But I think, you know, then I moved to Manchester and I lived in a collective house with other feminists and I got involved, as a feminist, in various campaigns and in young women's groups and all the rest of it. So you know, I think I realised I needed to educate myself about things that, you know, I'd sort of buried myself in the books. So it was a kind of much more a dawning realisation. So really, the politicisation happened during my doctoral years, although I had the, you know, retrospectively these experiences as an undergraduate and obviously a child etcetera growing up. And I became involved in Manchester in, you know, lots of other groups, there were sort of immigration and deportation campaigns, I got involved in a publishing collective, that was principally inspired by a debate in Spare Rib that excluded Jewish women from speaking out about their position when they felt categorised and were silenced around the presumed alignment with being Zionist, and lots and lots of those kinds of political things, which, Nira Yuval-Davis actually has written quite a lot about, lots of people have sort of now reflected on that period of time. So I actually published, you know, a book before I became, you know, it was a book called That's Funny – You Don't Look Antisemitic; An Antiracist Analysis of Left Antisemitism, with a dear friend, who was a lesbian feminist activist, and it taught me a lot actually, and immigration lawyer, Steve Cohen. And the demand for publishing this pamphlet, it really was a pamphlet, came from Jewish feminists who felt this analysis was going to be useful in countering the antisemitism in the name of antizionism, that was circulating in the women's movement. Now, I want to say very clearly that I think that that debate happened then, and I hold to the positions I took then, but that's very different from what's happening now in the kind of weaponisation of accusations of antisemitism, and the way in which that is used to close down criticism of the State of Israel, and you know, this is something that feminists and Jewish feminists and socialists have played a big role in debating right now.

[01:53:14]

Lois: Yes.

Erica: It remains very salient. And you know, I became involved in, I suppose some anti-imperialist struggles more generally, and met people and talked with them, and I think that that helped the sort of… And of course, you know, all of how people react to you when you say you study psychology etcetera, you have to think and take those reactions seriously, what's going on and what that says. And so I think…I can't name a sort of lightbulb moment kind of thing. It was much more gradual, as a postgrad student, as I sort of grew up a bit, and… you know, understood that I needed these analyses to help me understand myself and to, you know, to be with other people.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: Yeah, and you know, so it became very, very important, from not being very important at all.

Lois: I suppose, just very quickly, you talk about being kind of anti-psychologist, and I'm just wondering how that feels for you, I suppose, within the kind of mainstream…what is that experience like within the institution and mainstream psychology?

Erica: Well, I suppose I'm now in a privileged position, you know, as a senior academic, that other people sort of…Marcuse's term, something about repressive tolerance or something, they kind of sometimes like it a bit, sometimes don't. I mean, I think because I work at the intersection of psychology, gender studies or sexual whatever, and childhood studies, you know, there's a way of playing off those different positions. I mean, I suppose I'm constitutionally marginal now, aren't I, and I'm suspicious in general, and I'm suspicious of the idea of having a unique place of belonging. I

think it's potentially dangerous and very exclusionary. So I mean, I've learnt to sort of…most of the time, I mean, there have been times when I feel pretty pissed off at being left out or marginalised or whatever, but mostly I enjoy the being in multiple positions and having lots of different perspectives. And you know, I never expected, I didn't expect ever – you know, this is one of the differences with young people who've kind of approached me and other senior academics, saying, "How did you get to where you are now, I want to go there and do that?" kind of thing. I didn't expect to do a PhD, I certainly had no idea I was going to get a job in a university, let alone an elite one and be a senior academic. I know this sounds very much like the sort of luck versus hard work gendered sort of locus of control stuff, but I do think that, you know, I might have a very different story to tell if I had said, "I really want to be a professor," etcetera, and I don't have that sense of entitlement about it, I can't even bring myself to…we don't get increments or whatever, I can't even bring myself to apply for them, because I just think, "Well, you know…" That's too much of…you know, every application you write, I mean, I'm in a very privileged position now, I'm not under huge amounts of pressure to income generate, which…and I've only ever published the stuff I wanted to publish. So yeah, my advice to feminist academics, or, you know, in psychology, don't do any research that isn't meaningful to you just because you think that it'll get you somewhere. You know, that's why I said I think it was, in a way a favour, although I felt a bit looked down upon working in a mere polytechnic and, you know, it was very low status in higher education, it didn't have that pressure, it didn't have the pressure to write particular things, you know, and because I was research active, it was such an amazing thing, they didn't really care what it was.

Lois: Yeah.

Erica: And because we put Manchester Poly on the map a bit, you know, that was a good thing. So paradoxically, being marginal got some sort of benefits or attention, and because I didn't do anything I really didn't want to, I mean, in the end, I did go for a European Social Fund grant, and there is that, I'm sitting in this room now and I've got a window here, and I remember looking out of the window at the…and it was sort of, the deadline for the grant, and Khatidja Chantler and I were just working so hard on this grant, and I opened the curtains and I saw the tree was in bud, and instead of saying, "Bigger buds," I said, "Bugger bids." And you know, at home we talk about this a lot, you know, that was a real sign, never again, never another grant, and it would be impossible to get that now because they've changed, but anyway, Brexit and everything…you're not allowed to. But, you know, that was a valuable piece of work, you know, and I would just say don't stop being feminist when you become a psychologist.

[01:59:46]

Lois: That's lovely, thank you. Okay, so just for the record then, could you state your place and date of birth please?

Erica: My place?

Lois: Yes, date and place, yeah.

Erica: Oh, of birth.

Lois: Yes.

Erica: Yeah, I was born in Liverpool on the 4th of July 1960.

Lois: Lovely. And your gender?

Erica: Well, the birth certificate says I'm a girl, because I have seen it actually, yeah, so I do identify as a woman, cisgendered, yeah.[2]

[2] Erica: what I mean by that is that it all seems pretty arbitrary (and I well know how much people struggle to get that 'recognition' shifted…. Since I have supervised quite a bit of work on this). Given the caregiving arrangements of my early life, where power was not distributed across gender relations in conventional ways, I am probably more gender-

Lois: And your occupation?

Erica: So I work in the Institute of…Professor of Education, so when I left MMU I had Psychology and Women's Studies as my title, you know, and then I got the job, and for lots of reasons I just thought, "I'll take a general title," Professor of Education in the University of Manchester…Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, that's where I am.

[End of Transcript]

fluid in constitution than many others of my generation, and I'm sure that if I were a young person now I would claim that positioning (but it seems rather late to do so now, and there are other political reasons for maintaining the position 'woman', as I mention in the interview….)