

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Esther Rothblum

*Interviewed by Tera Beaulieu, Axelle Karera & Jenna MacKay
Newport, RI
March 14, 2009*

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ER – Esther Rothblum, interview participant

TB – Tera Beaulieu, interviewer

AK – Axelle Karera, interviewer

JM – Jenna MacKay, interviewer

TB: Ok, I am going to start by asking you to state your full name, place and date of birth for the record.

ER: Esther Rothblum. I was born January 11th, 1955 in Vienna, Austria.

TB: Oh wow, very neat!

ER: Yeah.

TB: Ok, we usually start our interview by asking our interviewees about the development and emergence of their feminist identity.

ER: In my case, I am actually an immigrant to the U.S. from Austria. I spent my childhood living in many different countries. My parents were working for the foreign service so we lived in Nigeria, Brazil, Spain, and Yugoslavia. But anyway, my father always wanted me to come to a college in the U.S I think to meet a Jewish husband, which is kind of funny. I went to Smith College, which is also funny because Smith, you know, was not yet the hot bed of lesbianism as it is today but certainly was beginning to be a very feminist college. I was seventeen years old and I had never really lived in the U.S. I had been educated in American schools abroad, or British schools, but I didn't know a lot of things about U.S. culture, so my first week in my house, as it was called at Smith College, we had a house meeting and the house president was a senior college student, Lynn Kramer was her name. She said to us, among all the other rules of the house, a man had been seen on the top floor of our house, and I was sure she was going to say to lock your doors, don't walk alone, come in early. Instead, she said, "If we see him, let's tackle him all together," and I thought "wow." You know, there are eighty of us and there's one of him and that was, to me, the beginning of feminism. This is incredible, we are a large group of women and this is one guy who is harassing us. So, I really thank Lynn Kramer wherever she is today - I know she is a judge - for that. And then I became very interested obviously in women's issues and feminism. I went to Smith in 1972 right after the 1968 women's movement. That was really a great time to be at the women's college and we would see films and whenever there was a sexist scene everybody would hiss, the whole audience. I just loved to be in this community of women. So, that was really the beginning of feminism.

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TB: Can you tell us more about different things you mentioned like watching films together or other sort of activities that you participated in? What was the general tone going through school with women at that time?

ER: Yeah, you know it's interesting today because I am in a women's studies department and our students would actually, I think, look down on the idea of an all women's college and somehow it wouldn't be as good as, it isn't the real world, but it was just so exciting at the time. And there was so much sexism in the outside world. Very much, women's colleges were seen as girl's schools. What was great was that even the Ivy Leagues like Yale had just gone co-ed a few years back, so it was still a place where really elite women would go. I think today, there would be much more pressure on young women to go to Harvard or Yale. I mean there was no Harvard for women then, it was Radcliffe and so on.

One of the things that happened in women's college is the class president is a woman, the head of every varsity team is a woman. If a professor is looking for an assistant, of course it has to be a woman. That may not seem that radical today, but it was amazing that women were in all leadership positions. We still had male faculty, obviously, and my first two years we still had a male president, then we had a female president, Jill Conway, who actually came from Toronto to be the first president of Smith. It was all the excitement that we are all women and the world is sexist, but we are going to be this group of leaders that will change the world and kill the patriarchy and whatever.

TB: How did you get in to psychology and what pulled you in that direction?

ER: Well, when I was filling out my college application, we had to put down a major and I really had no idea. Nobody in my family had gone to college and we knew very little about U.S. colleges anyway. I remember working in my high school library and I got to see all the new books as they came in and there was this book with a turquoise cover, I remember, called *Psychology*, so I borrowed it. I read it and I thought this would be a great field to go into because I felt my family was very eccentric and if nothing else, I will be able to understand my family. So, I put down psychology on my college applications and, of course, that meant I then got an adviser who was a psychology professor and he said well start with psych one. And psych one, as you know, is a bunch of rat studies, and physiology and motivation. It has little to do with people, but people had told me it would be boring and it was, so I was able to get through that phase. And then I just kept taking psychology courses. And then I asked what you do with this degree and people said you really have to get a PhD and I thought "Ok, I'll go on with that." So, there wasn't any creative or rational reason other than something to put on my college application and I sort of stuck with it.

TB: What did you do for your PhD dissertation? What was the topic?

ER: It was on learned helplessness, which is one of the theories of depression.

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The way I got into that was when I got to graduate school at Rutgers, my very first class was

called behavioral assessment and the professor said you have to do a paper on a behavioral assessment of something like depression. This is before the DSM III [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, third edition] and there was not really a criteria for health issues and I thought, "How would you do a behavioral assessment of something that is a bunch of feelings or thoughts?" So I did my paper on that and that professor said, "Do you want to work with me, because I do research on depression?" So, I began to write, you know how graduate students do it, every paper in every class would be on some aspect of depression. So, for my dissertation, learned helplessness was very hot at the time. The idea that by giving people failure experiences, you can teach them to be depressed. I actually got the copies of the essay SATS, I guess, from the Educational Testing Service which was very close to where Rutgers was and students would fill them out and then get false feedback: either that they'd done very well or done very badly and then we gave them questionnaires about their feelings and thoughts. I never published it. It was kind of a boring field, although it has some applications for women, because of course, in many ways women are taught to be helpless, more than men.

AK: How did your feminist identity start merging with your work as a psychologist?

ER: Well, at Smith it was sort of everywhere; everybody was expected to have a career, to be a feminist and when I got to Rutgers I was shocked to see it was really the real world. This was still when psychology was mostly a male-dominated field, so all the faculty were men except for one woman who taught child psychology. All the students were male too. It was amazing. My class had three women out of eight students and we'd never had that many women in a class. Even though we looked very different, they could never tell us apart. The idea that we were three women and they were always confusing us with each other and we were very much ignored. The male students would play tennis with the male professors, but the male professors felt awkward inviting women to play tennis or maybe they didn't think we played tennis well or something. I was a pretty radical feminist, coming from Smith and I spent my years just being amazed at this. Nobody else seemed to think it was as shocking as I did. I think it kept my feminism going, just seeing this level of, it wasn't much of an overt sexism, but it was a lot of ignoring women and making us invisible in many ways.

TB: What has been the trajectory from your learned helplessness work to some of the work that you are doing today, which is completely feminist and pushes the boundaries and borders of things?

ER: I did my internship in Mississippi, which was one of those internships that keep you going in the academic track, and after that ... I got my doctorate when I was twenty-five years old. I was very young and I actually turned down two tenure-track jobs to do a post doc and all my mentors said that is really a bad idea, you never turn down a tenure job. They were probably somehow right. Nowadays, with this economy you wouldn't want to do that. I went to Yale to do a post doc in a depression research unit and that was connected to my dissertation on learned helplessness. The woman who was running it was sort of a typical woman of her generation, very male identified.

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[She was] the only woman who had tenure in the entire Yale medical school, which must have had three or four hundred faculty, just to give you a sense of what it meant to be a women in academia. She was very, very freaked out at the idea that I was a feminist. She hadn't realized I was a feminist when I applied, and I would give a talk somewhere in the community on women, she would always hear about it. She would come and sit in the audience, tear it apart, but I kind of kept going with depression and I was very interested in mental health disorders in which women predominated.

Even in Mississippi, I did a panel for a conference with five other women interns. One of them was doing research on agoraphobia, one on weight loss, one on assertiveness, and I was doing research on depression. One day at a cocktail party, I said, "When I think about it, most of my clients are women and in fact many of my research subjects are women." The one doing research on agoraphobia said, "You know, let me just think for a second. Well, yeah if I think about it." This is where feminism was about at the time. We had no idea about women and mental health. So, we did a panel and we invited one of my professors at Rutgers, Violet Franks, who was an adjunct person, who used to teach a course called women and therapy. She actually edited a book where every single author was a man writing about women and therapy: women and behavioral therapy, women and psychoanalysis. All written by men about women. Coming from that, I then edited a book with her called *The Stereotyping of Women: Its Effect on Mental Health*, where we each wrote about our area and why women may predominate and there is no research whatsoever. We had to kind of speculate. So, it came out of depression, but I got more into women's mental health in general. That is how the depression area continued.

TB: You've highlighted a bit how there were very few women in your program and even the authors at the time were men writing about women. Can you speak to some of the obstacles you may have encountered in trying to do your work and how you negotiated those obstacles, as a result of being a woman, as a result of being a women in psychology and trying to forge a pathway?

ER: Well first of all, in my postdoc, the woman who ran it was very much against the idea of feminism. In hindsight I have a lot of sympathy. She would easily have been fired if she had done stuff on feminism in that culture. I remember I was writing an article for some book on women and mental health and she caught sight of it, because we had a secretary who would type things and she saw it and she said to me, "You really cannot write this and use Yale University Depression Research Unit as your affiliation. This is not what we do." She gave me so much negative feedback.

Then, at the time, there was a psychology department colloquium series run by Ed Zigler, who started Head Start and he had the Bush fellowship in child policy or something closely connected to the George Bush family actually, there were four centres. He invited me to be an honorary Bush fellow. I wouldn't get paid, but I would be on his roster and I thought "Wow, I could write this article and call myself a Bush fellow and then this woman post-doc adviser she won't care, because it doesn't have her name." Many years later I actually wrote to him and sent him my CV and said, "Thank you for letting me use your affiliation at the time." So, that was one way.

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Now, I didn't feel like I had huge obstacles. I was trained in a very mainstream way and mentors, if anything, were men because there were really no women. I remember this really close group of women peers, my classmates, helping each other, giving each other advice about the ways to get around some of these. Another obstacle at the time was that there were so few journals in which you could publish anything on women. So *Psychology of Women Quarterly* had an editor who accepted so many articles that there was this backlog of five years or something and then she stepped down and the next editor could do nothing, but spend five years publishing these already accepted articles. We all knew that *Psychology of Women Quarterly* was not available, period. *Sex Roles* was a very, very mainstream journal at the time, so unless you were doing research on white rats, you almost couldn't get anything in there. Now when I look at what Irene Frieze is doing it's incredible, they're doing transgender stuff. So *Sex Roles* was completely out unless you were sort of a physiological psychologist. So you really had to think about where you are going to publish this and that was a real challenge.

TB: Wow, I didn't know that *Sex Roles* was so white rat...

ER: You should look at earlier issues.

TB: That is really, really interesting.

ER: Yeah, yeah.

TB: Ok, now I would like to talk a little bit more about the mentoring and the relationships that you have had and how that has now influenced the way that you mentor your students, because you have done a lot of work with your students and published with your students as well.

ER: Yeah, well, what really comes to my mind when I think of mentoring is my father who was very unusual in many ways and one of the things was that he had never gone to college and yet he was a diplomat. So people would say to him, "Where did you go to college?" Just assuming he had. Most diplomats in this country are WASP men from upper class families who went to elite universities and my father was Jewish. There were no Jews in foreign service and he was an immigrant from Austria and he had never been to college, it was very unusual. I think he really, really pushed my brother and me to go to college in the US. So, for the time, that was very unusual, to push girls that much. In many ways see him as a mentor in that way.

When I was in college, my honours thesis advisor [Jaap] Diedrick Snoek, was I would say a mentor. He was very sweet. He didn't publish a lot, but he was really supportive of his students who worked with him. So, those were really people who come to my mind in terms of mentors.

Then it was my female classmates. I would sort of imitate them and try to be like them and we would problem solve with each other.

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I remember when I came to the University of Vermont, which was my first academic position

and I had that for twenty three years until recently, ibuprofen used to be prescription medication at the beginning, so if you had menstrual cramps, you had to have a doctor who was willing to give you a prescription. None of my friends even had health insurance in the lesbian community. I remember hoarding ibuprofen. You had to have it in your car, in your purse, in your office, because you couldn't just go to a drugstore. A graduate student came into my office and asked me if I had any ibuprofen and I gave her some and told her, "You have no idea how radical this moment is. I am a woman professor, and there are very few of those, and you are a woman grad student, and there used to be very a few of those, and I am giving you ibuprofen!" I still tell that story today and people don't get how radical that was to actually have a woman professor, a woman student, because that was pretty rare at the time.

TB: Wow!

JM: You mentioned that now you work with a Women's Studies Department and are no longer affiliated with the Psychology Department and we would like to know: What motivated that change, what that's been like?

ER: Yeah, well, that was because my lover Penny is in San Francisco and I wanted to be in California. So for five years I was commuting from Vermont to San Francisco. First of all, for senior faculty they have to hire you at the same level as a full professor and that is a big risk, because they have to hire you with tenure because if you get there and you are horrible they have you for life. In other words, there are very few positions for full professors and usually when somebody retires, they replace them with the assistant professor and I always thought I would probably be staying in Vermont for life, because nobody in psychology is going to hire someone in lesbian studies. They are always looking for behavioral medicine or child psychopathology or something very mainstream. And in Women's Studies, they usually want people in the humanities, literature or history. So, I just couldn't imagine a position that would fit for me.

Then San Diego State, which is actually the oldest Women's Studies department in the country, and therefore the world. It was a department in 1969, which is quite amazing. It was doing a search in lesbian studies, body image, and psychology of women. It was incredible. It was perfect. It was actually Oliva Espin retiring, who was a professor there, and then Bonnie Zimmerman, who is a very well know lesbian professor in literature became a vice-provost and so that lesbian studies position was available. That was the reason that I applied, to be closer to Penny. It's been a huge transition going from psychology to women's studies because women's studies is in the humanities. First of all, it is very international and we forget that psychology is really very U.S.-based around the world, I would say. I taught in Australia and they have all U.S. abnormal psych textbooks and students have never heard of bulimia, and here they are reading about this. My colleagues are from all around the world and in our courses we use a lot of international topics and so on. I've learned to use the words like performativity, without smiling and stuff, so that's been a huge transition.

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TB: What would you say about the similarities and differences between psychology and women's studies and the relationship between the two? For myself as a psych student, my

experiences in both of these disciplines are incredibly different. So in terms of working in both of those, what are your thoughts on that?

ER: Yes, they are very different. Women's studies really come out of humanities and it is very influenced by that. In women's studies, they would see psychology as a very atheoretical. When I mentor my grad students, what they are taught, is they have a whole chapter on theory, what theory informs the research. In psychology, unless you are doing a thesis on psychoanalytic theory or something... We forget that we have a very unified theory in psychology. It's empiricism that informs us, but we don't have a whole chapter to explain that and students are very quickly indoctrinated in psychology that is the world, that is their theory.

In women's studies, you are more conscious of how you are approaching this theme. When I teach research methods in women's studies, we cover how do you do research using literature, poetry, historical archives, interviews, empirical quantitative data, media discourse, all kinds of different backgrounds. In psychology, at AWP [Association for Women in Psychology] even, many of the talks that are clearly in the psychology of women would simply be just looking at gender differences - that alone would be a women's issue. In women's studies, of course they would say, "First of all what is gender? Aren't you being essentialist? Why are you looking at gender differences? What is the theoretical background?" So, I am still struggling with it and it is a big transition working mostly with colleagues in humanities. I've even taught them how to calculate the mean. When we accept students and we rate them one, two, three and then they don't know what to do with the numbers.

TB: You said something very interesting in terms of being in Australia and having all U.S. materials and articles and how North American psychology really is. How do we go about diversifying psychology and validating and acknowledging different forms of knowledge and different ways of understanding the world?

ER: Yeah, psychology really does not question many of those assumptions. First of all, it is hugely based on North American undergraduate college students, if you think about it. When I was in college you weren't even required to indicate the gender of your participants, so people would say there were 88 participants and not even say they were men or women, for example. In a way the methods of psychology assume often, this idea, for example, of a control group and randomizing participants, assumes very much a laboratory setting or at least the ability to control your environment. How do you apply that to a warzone or to a country where people might be expected to bring all their friends and relatives to listen in or watch? International psychologists often were trained in the U.S., or Britain or Canada, and then they go back to their country and try to work maybe as one of the only psychologists in an entire region, having come from this very U.S. base.

TB: I would like to shift to some questions around some of the specific work that you have done. Looking back on your program of research, what are some of the themes in terms of the topics and work that you've taken up?

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ER: I started with this area of depression and why women and women and depression and then going on to mental health disorders in which women predominate. When the DSM III came out in 1980, that was huge because for the first time there were actual criteria. I don't know if you've seen DSM II. It looks like a little paperback book, sort of like a little Agatha Christie paperback, and it was organized completely according to psychoanalytic principles, because the American Psychiatric Association was very psychodynamic. So they would put alcohol abuse together with homosexuality, because they both were considered to be weak superegos. That was the thinking, the theoretical background. The DSM III was huge, because for the first time you could really do the research in a way that meant everybody was looking at, say depression, in the same way. When I did my master's thesis on depression, you would have to start by defining how you were defining depression; that was the first step. There was no DSM to say we used DSM criteria and so on.

So, from the mental health field, I continued to do three areas of research. Early on, I did a lot of research on academic procrastination. Why people put things off. It still was very related to depression. This kind of idea of people who had very high standards of perfection, who had a lot of fear of evaluation from others, tended to be high procrastinators. Then the weight area [of research], the one you were asking about. In academia, even when I was younger and weighed less, I always felt that I was one of the fattest people in the room. I mean weight and income are so closely linked in western countries that where you see fat people is where you see poor people. So of course on college campuses you see thinner people and people tend to gain weight with age, so younger people tend to be thin. I was interested in the area of weight and one of my colleagues kept saying that aren't "they" unhealthy. Not aren't "you," but aren't "they" unhealthy and this is something I'll talk about today in the workshop. So, I went to AWP in 1983, which was in Seattle, and they had a performance by the Fat Lip Readers Theatre, which was this group of very fat woman who would actually read their text and I was so taken by this that I thought, "You know what? Screw all my colleagues. I am going to do research on weight and stigma and why weight is so stigmatized." I started doing research in that area. Many years later, the Fat Lip Readers Theatre put out a video and it had an address and I sent them all my reprints in weight and said "Thank you, this is thanks to you," because they really got me started on that.

At that time, there was very little work analyzing the research on weight and health and I had to become such an expert on nutrition, which did not interest me at all; health, which didn't interest me at all; and dieting, which didn't interest me at all. Because everybody, if I talked about weight and stigma, they would always say "Well, what about dieting, what about weight." In the workshop today for example, I can guarantee you that somebody will say "Well, I lost 50 pounds on this diet," this sort of individualizing. It would sort of be like if you're giving a workshop on violence against women, and somebody said "But I did ask for it when I was raped." Of course there are individual differences, but that doesn't negate the general truth. I was doing research on weight and employment discrimination and stigma and do therapists stigmatize against people who are fat. In those days, the focus was on health and medicine, so in a way I felt like a fish out of water, because the few people who were doing research on weight tended to be physicians, nutritionists, or psychologists really out there in the health nutrition area.

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Now, fat studies as a new discipline has really moved into humanities, which is really great. You have people doing literature and theater and poetry and history and so on.

The lesbian area of research: I was editing the journal *Women & Therapy* and did an issue on lesbians and I began to do research on lesbians. What I often tell my students is it was so much easier to do research on lesbians in the late '80s than it ever was to do research on women in the early '80s. I think what was so threatening about women's issues and psychology of women was that, I think my colleagues got it, that if we began to let women in, they would soon be in the minority, which of course has happened very quickly in psychology. Whereas lesbians, they thought "Well maybe there's one in Vermont, who knows. She's studying this trivial area, go ahead, good luck." They weren't nearly as threatened by the lesbian stuff as they were by the women. That's why I feel so sad that many women's studies programs are changing their names to gender studies, because they want to include transgender issues and so on, because they have no idea how hard we fought. And that word "women" was always said with such venom. I can still remember my colleagues say *women's studies*, dripping with venom as they said that word, and "women" was always seen as a very trivial issue. One of my professors on internship said to me, "Don't study women, it is too narrow." He was absolutely right; you couldn't publish it, there was nothing out there, it was a very narrowed field. "Women" was seen as a very narrow area.

JM: Maybe we can continue some of the discussion around size acceptance. You are very involved with the National Association for the Advancement of Fat Acceptance (NAAFA). Can you tell us a bit about that organization and your work with them?

ER: I can't say I am terribly involved with them, but NAAFA was started in 1969, and people forget that fat studies has been around since the '60s and they are still the organization the media will focus on, when a reporter does a really good job on weight or size acceptance they usually will have somebody from NAAFA being interviewed. What fascinates me is that when women's studies started in the '60s during second wave feminism, almost immediately there were hundreds of organizations and consciousness-raising groups, and this and that. With fat studies there's never been quite that exponential growth. So, NAAFA continues to be the main organization, although there are obviously others.

One thing that always fascinates me is why have fat studies, or whatever you call it, size acceptance, not been allowed to grow the same way as women's studies? Even every campus will have a group for transgender students and really there can't be that many students who identify as transgender, whereas probably every second woman on campus, if not every woman, feels too fat. So, why has fat studies not really become such a big group? I think there are lots of reasons why. There would be a multi-billion dollar economy that would collapse if women did accept their bodies, for example. I've been really interested in weight, weight stigma or fat studies, as one of the last areas where you are actually legally allowed to discriminate. The state of Michigan is the only state that prohibits discrimination based on weight and then a few cities also prohibit it, but otherwise it's perfectly legal to say, "I am firing you because you are too fat or we're not going to hire because of your weight, etcetera."

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TB: What would you identify as some principle topics, in terms of the field of fat studies within psychology that we should be taking on at this point in time? Does it revolve around women's self-esteem? Is it about raising awareness about these issues within the larger society and about discrimination? What would you pin point?

ER: Well you know, when you are in it, it feels like it is everything. For example, I am sharing a room with another psychologist here and we were looking at the program and just the wording of some of the sessions. I thought to myself, for the Size Acceptance Caucus it would be great if we had principles about what kind of language we can use just as other groups that had to be political about what language to use around say disability or race or gender. But it is everywhere. It is connected to class, because so much so in western countries, weight and low income are connected. It is definitely connected to race and people have said that we are not allowed to be racist or classist, so we talk about, say, fat welfare mother, which can be code for poor women, for example. It is connected to violence, because women who weigh more than they should are often beaten up or traumatized. It is connected to mental health, obviously. It is connected to health in many ways. Somebody mentioned at the workshop yesterday that fat women don't like to go to doctors, because they are given such a negative experience and also to many other things, media, culture and so on. I see it as an enormous area that it really intersects with everything.

TB: Yesterday in the workshop someone mentioned that obesity being introduced or trying to be introduced into the DSM V, and I am wondering if you can speak to that or what are your thoughts about that?

ER: Yeah, well the DSM probably at this point makes billions of dollars for the American Psychiatric Association and it is a very political document, because if you are a therapist and your specialty is in the DSM, you can take insurance, you can give a diagnosis for that. Also, if you are a researcher and you are applying for funds say from NIMH [National Institute of Mental Health] there is a big focus on pathology, so if you submit a grant on depression it's more likely to be funded than a grant on why some people are not depressed or whatever. There a lot of pressure on the DSM working groups to make it larger and larger and larger, which of course it has become over time. There are a lot of things put in and there's very little ever taken out. Of course there is a lot of money to be made by including obesity in the DSM. It means that therapists could simply say, "I am seeing a client for obesity" and that would be enough to get insurance reimbursement, whereas in the past you had to argue that the person was also depressed or anxious or had an eating disorder. So, I can see absolutely why there is pressure to include it, but I think it is a terrible mistake. What fat people often have to do, if they have been discriminated against, is claim that they have a disability, because just being fat means people can fire you, but if you say I was fired because I have a disability that goes against the Americans with Disabilities Act. So, ironically in a very sad way, fat people have to say I am disabled, I am fat and now they can say I have a mental illness. Very similar, as you know, to homosexuality in the past.

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TB: What are the implications of that, in terms of women's overall mental health and our living

our every day lives to be diagnosed with obesity as a mental disorder? I think it is a fertile area for clinical development. Maybe you can speak to that about training programs for clinicians in terms of working with women with these body image issues and so on?

ER: Well, so many psychologists are involved with the other side. For example, people who have gastric bypass surgeries will often be part of a support group run by a psychologist, who is basically getting people ready to have this very dangerous surgery that often is very ineffective. Or may even be working with them afterwards, like how do you cope with whatever, that you can have a tiny portion of food in a restaurant. When you think about that historically, that is so weird. I mean eating should be something we love and food should be something that is good. How did we come to restrict our eating so much in that way?

JM: I know you were the president of Division 44 of the American Psychological Association [The Society for the Psychological Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues], so could you tell us a little bit about that experience?

ER: Well, when I saw the list of questions it asked about Division 35 (The Society for the Women of Psychology), and ironically I've really not been associated very formally with Division 35 ever. I was very connected with AWP early on and then sort of right away got connected with Division 44. At that time, APA would have a conference and there would be social hour for Division 44 and people would sneak in, and sort of look around, there would be a handful of people and those people are still around today, which is really great. The funny thing about Division 44 is I was asked... Division 44, and I think this is true of all APA committees, does not like you to run for office unopposed. Somebody was running for Secretary-Treasurer and I was asked if I would run against them, just so that we wouldn't be breaking any by-laws. I ran against them and I won and I actually hate being treasurer. I hate balancing my cheque book. I was shocked that Division 44 had so much money, because my theory is that you should spend it. Don't hoard it. It's one thing if it is your own money, but if people are paying dues, let's do something with it.

So, I think they were horrified to get this treasurer who couldn't balance a cheque book and wanted to spend all the money. And that's how I got into Division 44, in a very roundabout odd way. Then a few years later I was running for president. APA is a huge machine. You have the year of being president-elect, and then president, and then past-president. The Division 44 has always been great, first of all of alternating male and female presidents. Now, of course I don't know what they are going to do now when the gender is more fluid, but at least it meant they got more women in proportionately to the membership, which was mostly male and they were also great in getting in a lot of people of color. So, to this day, Division 44, if you look at their executive board, tends to have a lot of people of color and it really helped dispel this myth that being a gay or lesbian was a white issue, for example.

TB: Can you speak about your involvement in AWP over their history and how the organization has evolved as well?

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ER: The first AWP meeting I went to was in 1980. I was doing my postdoc and it was in Boston, so I drove there from Yale and I just, at the new members lunch yesterday met a woman who had not been back since that 1980 conference, and they had a women's music concert by Meg Christian, she is one of the early lesbian singers and there were actually a group of four that were very famous women musicians who were performing. Women would say that they would go to one of these women's music concerts and it would just change their whole life. They would go home, divorce their husbands, come out as lesbians, whatever. I just loved the music. Music validating women was amazing at the time, especially because my postdoc was so mainstream, and anti-woman.

That AWP made so much money, it was amazing. The woman who organized it she offered to start up a New England branch of AWP. They had this big conference at Radcliffe, and I went to it and I am not a clinician so all the workshops, this also happens at AWP too where therapy and this and that, and there was one session called writing. I thought, "Okay well let me go to that." So we went around the room and the women would say, "Well, when I have some time I want to do a piece about displaced homemakers." That was a big topic in the early '80s. And one woman said, "I want to write about body image." People were talking about writing, not publishing. So I said, "You know what? There is a new journal out called *Women & Therapy* and I know that new journals are desperate for authors. So, why don't we each write our piece and then we'll submit them to this issue, and we'll publish it as a thematic issue for New England AWP?" And they looked at me like I was from Mars, because they have sort of talked about maybe when I have time to write. We did it as a collective, this was a time when you never took sole authorship. I would drive to Boston and this group of women would be so freaked out, so I would interact with the publisher and the editor and another woman would interact with the other people and sort of having a writing group and a support group. Then we brought out this issue and it was called the New England AWP issue of *Women & Therapy*. I think actually AWP paid my airfare to fly to Seattle for this conference where I think met the Fat Lip Readers Theatre, because of this particular issue. I was actually the editor of *Women & Therapy* later on for at least 15 years. So, it started with AWP, with this particular issue. *Women & Therapy*, the journal, was then a venue where women could publish on women's issues, because of *Sex Roles* and *Psychology of Women Quarterly* being so unavailable at the time.

TB: You've done a lot of editorial work. You're the current the editor of *The Journal of Lesbian Studies*. Can you speak about your experiences in terms of editing and what the process is like?

ER: Well, there are two things: I love editing and I love having lunch with colleagues. A friend of mine calls me a flaming extrovert and I love bringing people together. *Women & Therapy* was just amazing, because I was 29 I think when I started editing it in a sort of fluke-y way. What happened is that we did this issue through AWP and then the editor, whose name was Betts Collett, asked me to be on the editorial board. I would get a manuscript here and there. Then one time, this hostile author wrote a letter, and I thought it was just addressed to me, but it turned out she wrote it to everybody on the board about how unfair the review process had been and we had rejected her article. This happens when you are an editor.

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So, I wrote her a letter back and I said, “You know, peer review is actually one of the few feminist things we ever do in psychology, because the editor does not have the sole power to accept or reject an article and it is your peers who do that.” I sent a copy of this letter to the editor, who was apparently very burned out and asked me if I would edit the journal.

What was so great about editing a journal was that I could invite whoever I wanted to be on the editorial board, women who were much more senior to me and then I could also involve students in being editorial assistants or reviewing manuscripts. When I wanted to do research on a topic, the first thing I would do was to devote the thematic issue of the journal to that topic and I would get to see what was out there, what people were writing about, not necessarily just do research on, but writing about. It has always been such a fabulous way to an amazing power to invite women to publish. I actually feel that publishing is a radical form of activism for women, because it is really hard to erase the published word. Even in countries that have censorship, they may not allow certain books or things, but other countries will hold them. When regimes change you can get those written materials back. Getting my students to publish has been a big focus of my activism, but editing is some thing I love to do and I've been doing now for probably half my life.

TB: Can you talk about how you encourage and mentor students through the writing process and the publishing process, because I know as a student there is a lot of anxiety around that and doing it incorrectly, and so on?

ER: Well, everything in life has kind of a series of steps, and once you've done it, it seems easier. I try to make publishing easy and fun, because I do think that students, especially women, think of publishing as something...you have to be John Grisham or something like that. Of course it gets easier when, let's say, editors know who you are and so on. With master's students, which is what I have now in women's studies, I actually write to journals and ask them if they have any books they want us to review and then I will e-mail all of our students and the first three that respond I will count them to be co-authors for this book review. I usually have a long waiting list. At the moment for example, I am doing five book reviews with 15 students, this semester, and it is a very easy process. I get the book in the mail, I read it and I write one page of comments, anything that sort of comes to mind. Every time I use a quote, I use the page numbers and so on. Then I will give it to next student. I give them three weeks to do it, to read the book, type up their comments and e-mail it to all of us on the team and then the next student. Then the student who is the last is the first author, meaning they have all of our comments and they write the first draft of the review and they can use whatever they want of our comments. Sometimes I'll even say some of us thought this book was good for the following reasons, but others had concerns and I just take that review and edit for writing and then send it to everybody and then send it back to the editor. It's been a process that works quite well.

What students often don't realize is how much work I am doing, getting the book, and then passing it around. You have to be very good with deadlines otherwise it never ends. I can get through a lot of book reviews in one semester that way. For the students, they'll see the e-mails and they go back and forth to the book review editor.

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Some book review editors take it as it is, some will have a lot of changes and eventually it comes out in print. I have a poster on my door that has a picture of the book and then the citation, the journal it was reviewed in and the students who are in it and so on. Many students have gone on, it shows them how to do book reviews of their own and encyclopedia [entries] and so on. In psychology, obviously what I would do, students would be working with me on my research, which is more what you are all doing, and then even if it was their dissertation, I would take the dissertation, turn it to an article and put their names first, because they have obviously done the dissertation, and then I would handle all the revises and resubmits with the editors. Many of my students in clinical psychology would go on to be therapists and they were not interested in this. Every single student I have ever had, their thesis or dissertation has been published. Once or twice it has been completely by the student as a sole author, meaning it was an area way out of my own, they did all the work. But even if a student does a thesis that it is unrelated to what I do, if they don't publish it in a year, I will say, "Look, I am submitting this. I will write it up, I'll be the second author, but this needs to get out there." I also feel it is unethical if you are giving questionnaires to 200 people and you are telling them that this is a research study and you never publish it. I think there should be an ethical problem there. I really feel like if you are taking people's time to do something, then you really should get it out there.

TB: We also have a question about the review process. You bring a feminist lens to reviewing textbooks, for example, which you have done a lot of. When doing those sorts of things, if there is homophobic material, if there is size-ist material, perhaps even in terms of images, how does one give feedback and how is that encountering bias and how is that feedback received by publishers and by those people who are writing the text?

ER: Well, there are so many ways to answer that question. If it is a journal I am editing, I have in the instructions that you cannot have material that is sexist, racist, homophobic, so people are aware of that. Recently somebody wanted to do a whole issue of the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* on lesbians and health. Now that sounds very innocuous, but I happen to know that this woman is extremely focused on weight. Every time I see her, she talks about losing weight, gaining weight, losing weight, gaining weight, so I said I just want to say two things about that topic. One is that people tend to focus on health disparities, when in fact many lesbians are better off than heterosexual women, for many reasons. So, you've got to have an equal focus on problems and resilience. Then I said, as you know, I am a fat activist, so I will not take any article. What a lot of people do is say lesbians weigh more than heterosexual women and therefore they're at risk for, then they list twenty things. There is no research on lesbians having those health problems, they are assuming it based on weight. She actually changed the whole topic to lesbians and resilience, which is really great.

In terms of textbooks, professors have a lot of say, because when you teach large classes, the publishing companies are desperate to have you use their textbook. They usually will send me a book once a year and say, "We'll pay you a 100 dollars if you'll write a review of this book." What they are really saying is "We'll pay you a hundred dollars to read this textbook and hopefully use it in your class."

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Their questions are very clever, like, “What do you think about chapter one? What do you think of this?” So, they are really forcing you to read it carefully. That is where I actually have standard stuff on my computer. I always say I look for two things. How they cover lesbian issues and how they cover weight issues. Then I give them a lot of feedback. They may ignore it, but at least they are taking me seriously, because I am saying I am not going to use this book if this is how you treat weight, for example.

TB: You just referred to yourself as a fat activist. I am curious about how you mesh your identity as a scholar and also as an activist, and how those two things work together? I would argue your work is incredibly political, in terms of how the political side is received and how we continue to push psychology into an activist sort of stance.

ER: As you know, everything is political that we do and psychology I think has tried so hard to be a natural science and to sort of imitate medicine, in many ways, that we forget how political it is. There is nothing more indoctrinating, I think, than a psych one course, or psych methods course, or psych statistics course. I was telling my grad students the other day, “You know these Likert scales, where you rate your self-esteem from one to seven? When did we begin to assign numbers to our self-esteem or anything?” Yet in psychology, that is the worldview that we convert everything to a number. Whatever feeling it is or whatever thought it is. It is very political. I mean, in other cultures you wouldn't even begin to know how to connect that self-esteem to a number. I just go from the outset that everything is political and certainly as a feminist, I have seen how we have had to politicize so many issues that are not completely mainstream. Even my male colleagues would look at gender differences, that was so radical 20 years ago.

I also think it is very important to be out as a lesbian. I once did a talk where I was asked my former students about many issues around mentoring and one of them said, “You know, if you know a professor is a lesbian, but she doesn't come out, what message does that send to you in your future? Does that mean you always have to be closeted and so on, because why isn't she out?” So, I take great care to be out. I mean, I tell anybody sitting near me on the airplane, any chance I get, that I am a lesbian. You know, “Is this business or pleasure?” I'll say, “Well, I just saw my lover Penny, and *she*...” Just to make sure, even though Penny is a female name. Similarly with weight, I call myself a fat woman, and I use that term. I think it is very important to use that as a model, that we come in all sizes, that I am proud of my body, that there isn't just these very artificial bodies that we look at in the media.

JM: One thing I was really curious about was that you have done a lot of work around same sex civil union and in the States it has a very heterosexist, homophobic climate right now, like Proposition 8. I am curious about your experience in doing this research in the current climate.

ER: Well, Vermont was the first state to have civil unions, even I think before Quebec or Ontario, which was the first province in Canada.

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At that time, there was so much focus on couples coming from all over to Vermont to have civil unions and we looked at that sample. What was so great about that was that we had access to the whole population, we had every single civil union certificate, which had people's age, ethnicity, education and where their parents were living and where they were living, were they ever married before. In another words, heterosexually married. From a research perspective it was great. Ironically, the funny thing about same sex marriage research is that I am not really a big proponent of marriage for same sex couples, but every body else assumes I am, because that is my research area. I just love the research, because it is so great to study couples when you have a population, not just a sample.

I actually think that marriage is a pretty patriarchal institution and in the U.S. many people get married for health insurance, what a pathetic excuse. We know that women who are married are at risk for depression and insomnia, to say nothing of doing so much of the housework and childcare. Even cohabiting heterosexual couples start to change when they get legally married, the same couple, in terms of having more traditional roles. My lover Penny and I never got married and we don't have a domestic partnership in California, but luckily we both have health insurance, of course. I don't know what to say about all these couples that are going to get married. I don't mind eating their wedding cake and going and hugging them, but you know it is just bizarre to me. That has been kind of a funny thing. Of all the important things facing lesbians and gay men and bisexuals, *marriage*? The other issue is the military. I would have never thought we would be killing ourselves to get into the military. Those are the two things in the U.S. right now that are a big focus.

TB: You are currently a member of a think-tank for LGBT public policy. Can you tell us what that is and what the mandate of that is and your role in it?

ER: I don't have a big role in that, that is Robert-Jay Green's think-tank. He's a professor at Alliant University in California and what he wanted to do was to have this collection of researchers on LGBT issues, so that when the media is looking for a topic, he can assign a person to a topic. I usually get calls around the same sex marriage stuff, but I am not directly involved in running it or anything, but I think it is a great idea.

TB: Can you tell us about how *The Fat Studies Reader* was developed and where it's at in the process, because this is cutting edge work in psychology and it is so neat to be able to document it as you are going through the process as well.

ER: I always tell people I have two areas of research right now, lesbian studies and fat studies. Lesbian studies is the mainstream one and fat studies is the controversial one. Who would ever have guessed? I was hired for a lesbian studies position. When I do a study on lesbians, I will get editors who have heard about it, asking me if I can publish it in their journal. That is how mainstream it has become. The fat stuff, I have to warn students that this will go through half of dozen rejections with really hostile comments. There is a sense of rage that I never used to get when I published about lesbians.

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The Fat Study Readers, just to backtrack, there was a group called The Fat Underground in the 1970s in LA. Five or six or so very fat women who would get together, they were radical feminists and they talked about fat issues. And then it disbanded. I am friends with one of them, Judy Freespirit, who actually wrote a piece with another fat activist called *The Fat Liberation Manifesto* and I have actually used that as the manifesto for the size acceptance caucus here [AWP]. They have no idea what radical roots that has.

Judy Freespirit was in her 70s, she was given three weeks to live, she was in a nursing home for terminally ill people and I happened to be sitting by her bedside when her attorney Sondra Solovay came in. Sondra was the reason that San Francisco has height and weight non-discrimination laws. The reason Sondra was her attorney was that Judy Freespirit was being denied admittance to a Jewish nursing home, because they thought she was too heavy and it would take more than one aid to lift her. So, Sondra was there for the legislation. We had to leave the room, because the nurses were coming in the room or something. So, we were sitting in the hallway and Sondra said to me, "Would you have any interest in doing a book on fat studies?" And that is how we got started, three years ago.

I have edited many books. We did a call for proposals. It is hard, because fat studies doesn't have the homogenous group that you would have, lets say, for women's studies or lesbian studies. We sort of sent it out to various listservs, and got a huge number of one page proposals and then we began to work with the authors. The topics were all over the place and we invited more people. We then got a contract with the University of California Press, and they wanted it, of course, to be smaller. It was really enormous in size, so I worked with authors to cut down their articles and so on. Then we submitted the whole thing with the photographs and the tables and all these author questionnaires they make you fill out.

UC press, this is really bizarre. First they sent it out for review and then we got one reviewer's comments with extensive suggestions. So I said to the press, "Can't we wait for the second reviewer?" Normally, you get all the reviews at once and you can deal with them together, because sometimes what one person says is a little different from another. They said, "No, no we want you to respond to just this reviewer." So, we spent half a year getting half the authors to change their articles and then we got the second reviewer, who was pretty much saying fine, so, that was fine. Then we pretty much thought we were in production, they had an editorial board meeting and one of their board members, this happens in fat studies, was so freaked out about this book. I think publishers too worry, are we going to be the laughing stock of other university presses, I don't know. The editorial board member gave us such hostile feedback. Basically, we would have had to change this practically into a dieting book, so we had no choice but to pull out. There was no ability to change this.

We then had to go through another round of submitting it to publishers. I have never had to do this before, get a termination agreement for the publisher. So, we went with the New York University Press, and that is where it is now coming out in the fall. This book has gotten so much media attention.

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In *The New York Times* they had a big spread with our picture, two years ago, I guess. A *New York Times* reporter spent three days with me. It is clear that when you have a book in an early field, often you have to go through these kinds of obstacles. If this had been a book on lesbians, I can guarantee you every press would have been killing themselves to do it.

TB: I read that article in *The New York Times*, and that is something that is incredibly accessible for the general public. You've also done a lot of presentations in the community as well. I'm wondering what you feel is psychology's obligation is to translating scholarly work to a community level and what the process of that is like, and whether we're doing a good enough job of that?

ER: First of all, what is funny about psychology is most people think they are experts on psychology because they watch Oprah, for example. So, I often wish I were in a field like physics where I could really give people the sense that what I do is so complicated, especially the rarer something is the more people have heard of it or they've seen on a reality show or something. I anything, there is so much I have to de-mystify. When I lecture, even to students on fat issues, I won't even let students practically raise their hand, because what they think is true is so much what they have heard on talk shows and in the media and has so little to do with facts. I like doing community talks, but I have to say the fat studies area is exhausting and stressful, because people can get so hostile about it and I think there is something so threatening.

With the same-sex marriage issue, there is a way that traditional, heterosexual, conservative, religious couples, I don't know why, but they feel very threatened. They'll say, "This threatens our marriage." When you think about that, its kind of a weird argument. I don't quite get what it is, unless what they're saying is marriage is such an elite institution that if you get married why did I have to go through this big wedding or something. Similarly, I think people who are hearing about the fat studies are at some level so freaked out. Maybe what they are saying is, "I dieted all my life, I suffered, I restrained, I gave up all those desserts. So, are you really telling me that those people who didn't do that should get the same rights?" There is a way that we somehow feel that fat people don't have whatever, they are lazy and they don't have self control. There is a level of stress I feel when I talk about fat issues that I don't feel when I talk about lesbians, often. Today, I was telling Marcia Hill my co-presenter, who is a therapist, and she is going to be focusing on how you deal with this fat talk by your clients, "I'm so fat, etc." and I said to her, "If anybody in the audience starts telling me the story of how they lost weight, I want you to answer that question, because I am sick and tired of it."

TB: We've focused a lot on fat studies and fat activism work that you've been doing, but you've also done an incredible amount of work in civil unions and same sex marriages. I was reading your article about a three-year follow up study. Can you just speak to what that process has been like, because you have been able to document it as it's been going on? How has that work been developing?

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ER: In the research on civil unions, one of the big challenges has been the statistics. When you are working with couples, first of all, in some cases only one person returns questionnaires or they both do, but at time two only one does or nobody does and then we compare them, of course, to their heterosexual married sibling and spouse and to a couple in their friendship circle who have not had a civil union. So, you know it is structural equation modeling and a lot of missing data. The data analysis has been a big hassle because I don't work with that kind of data, so we've had a statistician on staff. When I think about the future, like the ten year follow up is coming up and I am no longer working with students who have any quantitative training whatsoever, so this will have to be continuing to work with former students who are now doing their own work and so on. Some debating should continue it or not. Really the only way to continue this would be to pay the couples, because it is a long questionnaire and people are losing interest.

I think the issues there are more the issues that face any researcher, like funding and time and statistics and so on. Methodologically, it's been interesting and what is interesting about the follow up is the same sex couples that are really happier and have less conflicts and are doing so much better. I think what is going on there is when you have two men in a couple or two women, if men are from Mars and women are from Venus or the opposite, whatever, you've got two Martians and two Venusians, or whatever, in a relationship whereas in heterosexual couples it is a miracle that a man and a woman, raised so differently ever manage to get marriage to work. I mean, they should get an award for that. So, when you have two men or two women, even if they are both bad at something like, say two men who can't cook, at least somehow they are going to have to resolve that. Whether one would do all the cooking or if they share it or even hire some one to cook. At least it isn't like in heterosexual couples, where on average women are so much better at certain tasks, have more training, and men are so much better at others. Men have the potential to bring in so much more money. So, in a heterosexual couple right away, it is just so logical that if a child is sick or if they have to move, then of course it has to be the woman who gives up her job, otherwise their income is going to be so much less. But when you have two women or two men that isn't automatically the issue, so that is kind of interesting to see that.

TB: Did you have any more questions Jenna in terms of this area or we could just go to the transition part?

JM: I think it's probably good to transition.

TB: You have an extensive CV and a great deal of accomplishments, so I am just wondering what are the contributions you have made to the field have been the most meaningful or you feel have made a really significant impact on psychology?

ER: First of all, it is so hard to predict that. You do a study that you think is life changing and it never gets published or never gets cited, and then you do some thing like procrastination. Oh my goodness, we had every media all over us, all the time about procrastination which was never a big research area. To this day, I have a part of my website on the questionnaire, because we get so many reprint requests.

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In terms of the things I am proudest of, I edited a book called *Boston Marriages*, which was an old term for women who lived together in Boston, which had a lot of universities and schools, who were presumed to be asexual, at the time, just two women living together. What I did is I asked lesbian couples who were either not sexual, not having sex or who were not currently having sex, sort of how do you define a relationship when you don't have sex. That was, I think, a really interesting collection of pieces. One of my areas of research has been comparing lesbians to their heterosexual sisters, because sisters are so similar demographically in terms of race and ethnicity, they are typically around the same age, they grew up in same family, same childhood religion, whatever and yet in adulthood one is a lesbian and one is heterosexual. It turns out that they are demographically so different. I used to think that probably lesbians had politically liberal heterosexual sisters. In other words, these were families that had liberal daughters or non-traditional daughters and I was completely wrong.

The heterosexual sisters are absolutely like census data. They are homemakers, they are married, they are religious. Whatever religion they had in childhood, they still have it. The lesbians moved from the home, went to college, very different. That has been really interesting and I still like to compare people to their siblings. I just did a study of what is lesbian community and interviewed the lesbians and bisexual women and their sisters and now I am looking at this concept butch and femme, where if you ask ten women what that means, you get 12 different answers. And again I am not going to compare them to their siblings, but sort of looking what are at some of the differences among groups.

TB: Neat. You have also been honored in numerous by various groups and individuals. Can you speak to the award or awards that have been most meaningful to you and why?

ER: I actually would say that I once got an award from the NAAFA, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, way back and I said to them I can retire now, because this is the only group that really seems to be there for fat people and getting an award from them was great.

TB: There are so many different layers to your career and also to your person as a woman, as a psychologist, and as an activist. Can you talk to us about the intersection of your own personal identity and how that has impacted and influenced the work that you have done?

ER: In psychology, we are supposed to be so distant from our research and we all know that we study what we are interested in, what we are. In women's studies it has been great, because we always teach our students you have to begin by basically saying what is your position vis a vis this research. You can't just suddenly choose to study violence among the elderly out of the blue. I mean, there must have been a reason. Obviously everything I do is informed by my life and so on. Fat studies, I am a fat woman. Lesbian studies, I am a lesbian. Back in the days when I did women's studies, I am a woman, that was a big deal. Many of us had to learn that we were women. So, I guess that is the way my personal life has informed that.

TB: What inroads have feminists made in psychology and what have been the major accomplishments of feminist psychology and what is some of the works that remains to be done?
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ER: Feminists has made huge inroads in psychology. It is amazing just looking at AWP, which was the forerunner of Division 35 and Division 35 now is so mainstream, it is amazing. The inroads have been enormous in every possible way. I was taught in grad school that violence against women, that rape was very rare. You might see a client in your lifetime and that would probably have been true, because there was no language and clients wouldn't have talked about it. Now, look at all the sessions on violence against women, everything. It is amazing what feminists have done. The foremothers who did lose their jobs, or who never got a job, or who spoke out about one issue and then were silenced, has been incredible.

So, what issues are left to do? I think there are always going to be enormous issues. I think it is important to remember that there still is a lot of sexism and discrimination. It isn't that the women's movement has come and gone. I was talking to a friend about that. I used to teach a course called feminist therapy and at the beginning the students would be just amazed at some of the things we talked about and later on they would say all of our supervisors talk about this, the men and the women. My friend was saying yes, but they don't do it at a deep level. There is a lot of lip service to some of these things, but do they really get it about how to be truly feminist in therapy, for example?

TB: I am just looking here and I guess you co-edited *Learning from our mistakes: Difficulties and failures in feminist therapy*. What was that like? It must be so difficult as a feminist psychologist to be open and acknowledge some of the difficulties in terms of some of the advancements that have been made. How was it putting together that text?

ER: That was really more about experiences people have had as therapists where they clearly messed up and made mistakes. I could easily do a book about mistakes in our teachings also. I don't know if you have been a teaching assistant or taught a course, but there are so many decisions you have to make where you think later, "Boy, I shouldn't have done it that way." I can't, at the moment, think of an example, but I am sure there are hundreds eventually I could think of. You just realize that that is not the way to present that material or to teach that course, for example.

TB: What advice would you give to a woman or a man who identifies as a feminist, who is trying to pursue work in the field of psychology?

ER: I would say don't let any one talk you out of going into a field because it is too new, too radical, you'll never get a job, because ironically those can be the very fields where suddenly it's a very hot area. People were told once not to work with AIDS, that was so controversial. Now look at all the funding sources. I was taught not to study women and it's been the secret of my success, I would say, and not to study lesbians, and I got this job in lesbian studies. Maybe one day there will be a position in fat studies.

TB: Is there any thing else that you would like to tell us about, to document on the record that we haven't asked you about?

{10:00}

ER: I don't think so. It has been great to do this, thank you.

TB: Thank you so much.

JM: Can I ask you a question? I know when we are looking through your CV, it is so extensive and you have done so much work and been so busy. I am just curious: how have you managed to balance your professional life with your personal life?

ER: You know, one time somebody was introducing me at a talk and I went through all this stuff and somebody in the audience said, "When does she have the time to be a lesbian?" It was really great.

The interesting thing, and I wonder if this is a lesbian issue... First of all, I live 500 miles away from my lover Penny, so when I am in San Diego I am working, but I love my work, so I could say I am a workaholic, but it is also my passion. I love writing and publishing. I wouldn't say I like serving on committees, that kind of thing.

I have two types of friends, those who think I work all the time and those who think I never work. It's very funny. But also, as soon as a friend calls, I drop everything and spend time with them. So, I do prioritize work, but I never let it get in the way of friendships. I am a fanatic racquetball player. I actually participated in the Gay Games and I won a silver medal for my age group. I say my age group, because if I were in the twenty group I wouldn't have gotten anything. So, I spend a lot of time trying to find racquetball partners and I play in number of leagues, but getting back and forth is a big hassle. I really love being with friends and having meals with friends and having breakfast, lunch and dinner with friends. In terms of how my research informs my work, many people will feel sort of betrayed by the lesbian community, or say there was never one, or where is it, or it's elitist. I have always felt surrounded by a warm community, so I've been very interested in what does community means and how do we form these bonds and so on. So really, outside of work, it would be friendship and racquetball.

JM: Did we ask questions about mentors?

ER: Yeah, yeah.

TB: I find that for a lot of women its peer mentoring especially during the '70s and the '80s when there was often so much resistance. Even for myself, some of the best mentoring comes from my peers.

ER: Right, mentoring is such a funny issue, because you can assign people to have a mentor, which many programs try to do, and you don't do any harm that way. I mean, I would say sometimes a mentor becomes a true mentor, but that is very rare. It almost has to be a real great coincidence to find somebody who really is that kind of a mentor. I mean mentoring can be very specific, and also I say this about friendships.

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I have friends I play racquetball with, friends I have chocolate with, and friends I talk to, and friends I do things with. So, a mentor, too, doesn't have to be this all-encompassing person. They can be a white male statistician who tells you for once how to do things and can be somebody who gives you a piece of advice about how to drive to work.

So, it doesn't always have to be this all important thing. People who have these amazing mentors are really lucky, and I would say on average people don't have those kinds of mentors and actually if they do, then the big challenge is what you do when you've outgrown them. I have lots of friends who feel a sense of guilt, sort of like outgrowing your parents. What do you do when your mentor expects you to ask their advice about your research, or get in touch and now you sort of want to move away?

TB: Thank you.

{14:00}

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