

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**

**Interview with Ingrid Johnston-Robledo**

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford  
Washington, DC  
February 22, 2013*

**When citing this interview, please use the following citation:**

Johnson-Robledo, J. (2013, February, 22). Interview by A. Rutherford [Video Recording].

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. Washington, DC

**For permission to use this interview in published work, please contact:**

**Alexandra Rutherford, PhD**  
Project Director, Psychology's Feminist Voices  
[alexr@yorku.ca](mailto:alexr@yorku.ca)

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2013

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**  
**Interview with Ingrid Johnston Robledo**  
**Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford**  
**Washington, DC**  
**February 22, 2013**

IJR: Ingrid Johnston-Robledo, interview participant

AR: Alexandra Rutherford, interviewer

---

AR – Okay, if I can get you to state your full name and place and date of birth for the record.

IJR – Ingrid Johnston-Robledo. Dayton, Ohio. January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1968.

AR – Great, great. Well, thank you for agreeing to do this interview with us today, with me. I'm going to ask you the first question that we always start with which is can you tell us a little bit about how you developed an identity as a feminist?

IJR – Sure, ever since I was a little girl I've always been fascinated by periods and by bodies and so that was really the emergence of my sense of self as a girl and my interest in girls and women's bodies. In high school I wanted to counsel pregnant teenagers. That was my career goal. I don't know where this came from.

AR – Nothing in your family?

IJR – No, I had a feminist stepmother who was a delivery and labor nurse. She was really involved in second wave women's movement. Big Joan Baez fan and the whole bit but I never studied women's studies in college. I was really minimally involved in the student union on campus so I didn't really get involved in academic feminist work until I got into grad school and worked with Joan Chrisler who was also really interested in menstruation so it's just amazing to me that that personal interest stuck and emerged into something really academic once I got exposed to mentors.

AR – So even though you have this longstanding interest that you can trace back to women's bodies and menstruation and so on, it wasn't connected to feminism per se at the time?

IJR – No, not really. I hadn't politicized it. It wasn't part of my upbringing. In college I went to an abortion rights rally and I did do an independent study project on the menstrual cycle but because I hadn't been exposed to any of the social psychology or feminist psychology, I hadn't taken a psychology of women course, I just didn't connect all those dots. So I think I was a

feminist in a spiritual way but not really making connections with a lot of activism or scholarship until grad school.

AR – Huh, well I want to get there but I also want to explore a little more...do you have any sense of where your interest in women's bodies and women's health where that came from?

IJR – I really don't know... I just read everything I could get my hands on about menarche, really craved conversation with my mom about sexuality and bodies. I just don't really understand where it originated. It just was almost always there.

AR – Do you remember any of the stuff that you read originally? Like was there anything that really stood out as being particularly, I don't know...transformative or useful at the time to further this interest?

IJR – No, I didn't really have access to a lot of books. It was more pamphlets or magazines... things I could get my hands on as a kid because my mom didn't do a lot of education with me. So yeah I don't know where it came from. It's funny that it really has remained an interest of mine [Laughs].

AR – Well, it really has colored your entire career.

IJR – It has and it was great to find other faculty who really made that their focus. I didn't even really know that those individuals existed [Laughs].

AR – Well tell me a little bit about going to college. You went to Quinnipiac College.

IJR – Yes, I did go to Quinnipiac. I studied bio-psychology because I thought I wanted to be an OB-GYN and I didn't get to the MCATs. So I switched gears [Laughs]. But that still was an interest of mine, maternal health, labour, delivery.

AR – Absolutely, so what happened then in terms of then you said you thought bio-psychology might be a route to sort of medical school and so on. Other than that, what attracted you to psychology per se?

IJR – I had a really phenomenal high school teacher. I took two or three psychology courses in high school and so I got really inspired to study all kinds of things related to psychology. We took a course on drugs and behaviour and child and development so I got interested in psychology at a pretty young age but then I also really had these health interests so my father who taught at Quinnipiac said "Oh, they have a psychobiology major maybe you can do that." So I decided to go ahead and apply for that program. It was a good fit for me.

AR – Yeah, yeah so did you have any mentors at Quinnipiac or any psych professors that could have been...

IJR – No, not really. It was almost all pre-med curriculum so I did a lot of work with faculty from all over the natural sciences. I did work with Joan Bombace who was an experimental psychologist and she was the one who supervised my independent study. I studied olfactory sensation and how that changes over the menstrual cycle so she might have thought I was a bit of a joke but she was excited that I wanted to do research and she didn't have any interest in that work but she helped me submit my work to the New England Psych Association and that was my very first conference presentation and so I think I would identify her as the closest thing to a mentor but not in terms of feminist psychology but that was sort of the beginning of my work as a researcher.

AR – Yeah, so you got kind of turned on to research by her?

IJR – Yeah, definitely.

AR – Well, that's important in terms of your future in psychology so how did you get hooked up on...well first of all, what made you decide to go on in psychology?

IJR – I just knew I wanted to go to school forever. Really, my dad was an English professor and he was a huge role model of mine and so I just knew I wanted to be an academic. I never had any thoughts about working at anything else. So I applied for mostly programs in animal behaviour for grad work because I got really interested in socio-biology, in animal behaviour. Mostly maternal primate kinds of behaviour, but I got rejected from all of those schools because it wasn't a good fit for me, I didn't have good GREs. Some of the faculty told me about the program at Connecticut College so it was kind of a back-up plan for me because it was framed as a good segue into a PhD program but I had no idea that Joan was there that somebody was there who wanted to do my kind of work. It was totally serendipitous.

AR – Right.

IJR – But it was just a place to go and study and get my feet wet in terms of graduate work and it was local. I just got so lucky [Laughs].

AR – Well talk a little bit about your master's work then and your work with Joan. I noticed it was on ecofeminist theory. Which is interesting.

IJR – Yes, I tried a lot of different things [Laughs].

AR – So just tell us a little bit about your master's.

IJR – That was a great experience for me. I loved my coursework. I got really close to Joan and to Jane Torrey who was a wonderful feminist mentor as well. Just really enjoyed my women's health seminar and my courses in psychology of pain. Just lots of real health psych kinds of courses that I really got passionate about and I also met on a weekly basis with Joan's research

group so right from the beginning we did the menstrual joy work together that's really been a fun project. I don't know, I just really unfolded as a feminist scholar and as a student of psychology through that program. It really has a special place in my development.

AR – Well one of the things that I'm really trying to get a handle on in these interviews is how has it been that people who now identify as feminists psychologists, how did they bring their feminism into psychology? How has that worked for them? Can you think of any particular moments when you realized that you were bringing feminism into your work as a psychologist?

IJR – Uh...definitely moments in coursework at the Master's level where we would talk about power, talk about health disparity, we would talk about body shame. Sort of a gradual percolation I guess. A lot of different ideas around gender bias or power. The dots started to connect for me that this was political but it was never an 'aha' moment, it was 'alright this makes perfect sense.' I don't remember a lot of personal resistance to that but I guess one thing I would like to say about that is that I wrestled a lot with some essentialism because I'm so grounded in menstruation and pregnancy. I sort of spiritualized that and that's sort of why I got interested in ecofeminism. I really liked that idea of women being sort of special in terms of their attachment to the earth and their bodies. Working with Joan and then working with Bernice who is just this incredible social constructionist behaviour who they sort of had to challenge me in a lot of personal ways to get me to think a little differently about gender [Laughs]. So that was a little bit of a tension for me personally to sort of figure out how to explore those areas out in a curious way but not really run away with them by essentializing women and women's bodies.

AR – Well, when you do work on the body, the body is a very material and sensual kind of thing so I think it is a bit trickier. I mean gender as a concept you can get your head around that you perform gender but when you come back to the body, the body is the thing right?

{10:00}

IJR – Yeah.

AR – So I can imagine that can be a kind of tricky turn to make or thing to grapple with.

IJR – Yeah, and I find that associating with people who do that kind of sexuality, menstruation and pregnancy in enough of a way to connect spiritually because it's just what I do. It's who I connect with. In terms of scholarship it's not been hard to sort of move away from you know grounding a woman's identify and those aspects but it took some training to get me to appreciate why that's important.

AR – Anything that you were reading during grad school that sort of really became important to you and your work?

{11:00}

IJR – Yeah, I have a special memory of Adrienne Rich’s *Of Woman Born*. Different kinds of book about motherhood that I got really inspired by Carol Tavris’s work in grad school...Emily Martin and really women from all different disciplines so from a really young age in my trajectory I knew I really cared a lot about interdisciplinary even though the programs I had chosen were straight psych programs but the women’s health field is so interdisciplinary that I was exposed to a lot of different perspectives and authors so those are some examples.

AR – Yeah, I just had some students read Emily Martin’s *The Egg and the Sperm* and we had some good discussion about it.

{11:50}

IJR – And Jane Ussher. There are so many but in grad school I remember reading mostly primary sources and articles and...

AR – Sort of research articles.

IJR – Yeah.

AR – Well tell us for the camera, for people who might not be familiar with your work, tell us about the menstrual joy work that you did. What is menstrual joy?

IJR – [Laughs] Well, it’s fun. A group of researchers decided to write kind of a mock questionnaire based on the menstrual distress questionnaire which Moos had developed in the sixties and is really widely used for symptomatology and so they were just like “What if we did just make a new measure that listed all of these ‘symptoms’ that represented things that were really positive about menstruation and pre-menstrual experience?” Like the one I remember was revolutionary zeal [Laughs] or feeling really energetic or sexual. So Joan had an idea of just using that as a real tool to see how people would respond to it and to see how it would affect people’s attitude to fill out something like that first, to be primed by this idea that it could be positive if not joyful and then see what kind of impact that would have on a regular attitude measure. So it’s just really...I mean it’s a little more involved than that. But then the follow up piece to that was open-ended questions about women’s responses to a questionnaire on menstrual joy. You know, they were saying it’s an oxymoron but maybe I will think about my period a little differently next time. Really neat qualitative data in that study as well.

AR – Absolutely.

IJR – It was a really fun project.

AR – It sounds like you were really trying to turn things on its head. Really actually question basic assumptions with a really interesting, almost intervention, kind of way.

{13:40}

IJR – Yeah, it’s gotten cited by a lot of other researchers, by textbook authors because it does do just that. It’s been really fun.

AR – Yeah, absolutely. Well, tell me a little bit then...I want to get back to your research and have you talk more about that, but in terms of filling out your training trajectory, you worked with Joan Chrisler at Connecticut College during your masters and then you moved on to work with Bernice Lott and so can you tell me a little bit about that transition and then what you did during your PhD work.

IJR – Sure, at Connecticut College I had an opportunity to do an internship and most of my friends were doing clinical internships but I knew I wanted to do more research so they arranged for me to have an internship with Bernice. So I went a couple times a week from New London to Kingston? Yeah, to work with her on her distancing work. So she was looking at social distancing and trying to continue to develop some of her theorizing and applying that theory to gender and I met Renee Saris who was one of my best friends while I was pursuing graduate work there so the three of us worked on that project there. It was pretty minimal. We got a *Sex Roles* publication out of it but it was just really neat to work at another institution and work with another feminist psychologist very different from Joan and then I wasn’t quite ready to go straight on for grad work so I was going to take time off. I had just met the man that I would later marry and he was a cook so I told Joan maybe I’ll take some time off and work in a restaurant and she was like “No, you’re not going to do that, that would be a really bad idea” [Laughs]. So I was like, alright I’ll just apply to the University of Rhode Island just to see what happens and they accepted me and gave me a full teaching assistantship so it was sort of a no-brainer that I should just forge ahead [Laughs]. So I have her to thank for steering me in that direction so I right away had Bernice serve as a major professor and got going with all kinds of other work, mostly in social psychology...psych of poverty.

AR – Right, which has been a big, big area of hers and I noticed it threads throughout your work as well.

IJR – Yeah.

AR – But your dissertation was on child birth preparation and support...

IJR – And here again is the midwife OB wannabe. I was trying to sort of wrestle with that in my grad work. That was a tough experience for me because there wasn’t a lot of women’s health course work available in that program. I did take one women’s health course, so I just sort of forged my own way and Bernice wasn’t familiar with childbirth education or that aspect of women’s lives at all so I pieced together a committee with a lot of nursing faculty and just really dove into that literature. All nursing literature but I was really struck by how quiet psychologists were about birth. It just really seemed like such a natural discipline to inform childbirth education but really there was very little in psychology so I got really inspired to do that and the

low income women piece I don't really remember how that came into it. I think I was just really excited about studying income issues through my work with Bernice. So it was kind of a random thing too looking back. I kind of wished my course work had fit better with that project and it took me a long time to finish because it was community research with low income women.

AR – Yeah, well can you tell us a little bit more about the process of doing that research? What it involved and how you accomplished it?

IJR – I went to a lot of different clinics and childbirth educators and just tried to solicit participation through different classes and different WIC offices trying to get a sample of women of both means and struggling financially.

AR – Was that challenging in terms of doing community based...?

IJR – It was because I didn't make the time to meet people so here are these women being recommended by their nurse practitioners or by the receptionist to fill out this survey and mail it back to me. This was all pre-SurveyMonkey and almost pre-email so it was just very painstaking. Every time I got one in the mail I got so excited [Laughs]. It took me forever to collect that data so I should have been present at the clinic interacting with people maybe interviewing them while they waited but I didn't.

AR – Hind sight is twenty-twenty [Laughs].

IJR – Yeah [Laughs].

AR – When did you start getting involved in organizations in psychology that were feminist organizations? Places like Psych of Women?

IJR – Yeah, Joan...introduced me to AWP in '91. That was my first conference. I attended those conferences for at least a decade, every single year. So that was my professional home as a grad student which was just a great thing to discover. Really made instant friends and I loved the idea of going to conferences and taking in sessions and networking. I feel really lucky that I had such a generous mentor because when I was there she introduced me to so many people and it was just an instant network that I feel like I was exposed to. Division 35, um, I haven't gone. I haven't gone to APA [American Psychological Association] a long time. I don't even remember the first APA conference I went to but my first faculty position, she encouraged me to chair the student research committee so that was my first exposure to the EC [Executive Committee] and I did that for however long that term was. I think it was three years but I don't really remember going to APA or getting into that society for the Psych of Women sessions explicitly but that leadership role was probably the beginning of that. It took me a long time to feel comfortable in that group because AWP was so different.



AR – I was going to ask you to reflect a little bit on the differences between the two organizations. I know just for myself it felt like it took a long time to feel comfortable at Division 35 at the EC level. I wonder what your experiences with that were?

IJR – Yeah, that was hard for me too. I felt like I was always against like I should sit in the back. It always surprised me that I had a nametag that I could sit at the table. I never really felt comfortable. Everyone was always formally dressed...and stiff and that big board room shape seemed really intimidating to me and this was before there were a lot of ice breakers and young people at the table like I think things have really changed but when I first got involved it felt corporate almost.

AR – Right, which is a real contrast to AWP which is organized totally differently.

IJR – Right [Laughs]. Yeah so it took me awhile to find my place there.

AR – Yeah, not an uncommon experience. Well tell me a little bit about then again just following your trajectory then, your first sort of what did you do post-PhD?

{21:00}

IJR – Again, I applied for a bunch of positions tenure track and didn't get any so I ended up once again... Joan came to the rescue and suggested that I do a visiting stint at Conn which was great news for me because it was still in the area so that was in 1997 right after I had gotten married and had a baby so we were sort of committed to the area because our families were in Connecticut and she pieced together this joint appointment between human development and the psych department and I was able to do that for three years as a visiting faculty member and again that was a great experience for me because I was able to teach full time at a really selective institution, I was able to continue my writing with her to practice sort of full time teaching and then I was also able to have my second child there so I didn't have to worry about pregnancy and tenure track. It was just a great fit for me. I really enjoyed teaching there and then when that last year was up I got on the market and found a position at SUNY Fredonia which was also a great position for me.

AR – Well, the background here, that's not background in a way it's foreground, in that you're living this career trajectory that's also going alongside your personal trajectory, you're getting married and having children and can you speak a little bit about how you navigated that in terms of having those things going on in tandem?

{22:30}

IJR – Yeah, it's been really hard. It's been really hard...but really natural at the same time. My partner has been a full time dad ever since the very beginning. I could never have done any of this without that because I knew that I didn't want the kids to be in day care since they were

infants so we struggled financially but that was such a huge resource to me to have him be on the front lines on the day to day but it's really been exhausting to try to be a good professor, pursue my research, get really involved in these professional organizations, do all this travelling and still really raising kids and still feeling like you can be really present at home. So it's been hard.

{23:56}

AR – So is there anything in addition to obviously your support of your partner, is there anything else that has helped you kind of keep that going? Keep your sanity or...? [Laughs]

IJR – I think I've been at family-friendly work places for the most part. I haven't felt discriminated against as a pregnant faculty member, as a mother. I've had just a lot of awareness of that can occur just things I've written about discrimination. I really felt like I can thrive in my workplace despite that other pursuit.

AR – I think that is so key. This is one of the last frontiers so to speak for women and careers and how to create family friendly workspaces not just for women but for men too. What's emerging is kind of key in all this. Whenever I teach PhD students, the questions they always want to know when they learn about this project is “What do people say about how they manage to do all this?”

IJR – Because they want to...they want to do it all.

AR – They can't figure out the timing because it's never good timing for grad school. Yeah, it's interesting what you say. Can you speak a little more to that? You mentioned you had this kind of window?

IJR – Yeah, exactly. I tell all my students to have their babies in grad school. I don't know... I just use to... I had asked at a conference I forget who it was... Ellen Kimmel maybe. I had asked panelists about timings of babies and they said “Oh, wait until after you have tenure” and I was thinking to myself “I am not interested in that at all!” So when I was ABD I was already married, I was already on my husband's health plan and I had this baby who was really a very good sleeper and that was a huge plus but I was able to write my dissertation and teach classes part time and you know raise this infant really easily because I was home anyway right so that felt really right to me to get started in my late twenties, to have the flexibility, to not have to worry about when she was born but then my second child I timed his birth for the last day of finals, December 8<sup>th</sup> [Laughs] and that's when he was born. So I had five weeks to you know... that was really crazy.

AR – That sounds really hard actually. Five weeks...

IJR – Yeah but it was great to have two small children who were two years apart with the youngest being about two when I started my tenure track position so that sort of immediate,

intense stuff was sort of behind us. I felt like I had just made it easier for me to just kind of start my tenure track job.

AR – Yeah, good. Okay, if we can pick up again about having you tell us about your tenure track position and completing your family and how that all worked out.

IJR – Sure, yeah my first position was at SUNY Fredonia after I had left Conn and the job was so perfect for what I wanted to do and I was asked to teach Psychology of Women and Human Sexuality and course into and methods and other courses like that but it was such a perfect fit for the kinds of things I wanted to do. There was a three-three teaching load where I was expected to work with undergraduates which was exactly what I wanted to do. So that was really my first... I mean last, I guess [Laughs], faculty position that I got for full time there for about ten years. I directed women's studies, I advised the student union on campus and did all kinds of work around feminist psychology in my department. I was really one of the only people who specialized in gender there and drew a lot of students there to the women studies major.

AR – Were the folks you worked with in psychology pretty receptive to that perspective? How was that?

{27:50}

IJR – That was a little bit tricky. My work is really sensitive and a lot of people don't view research on sexuality, bodies, and menstruation as legitimate. There was a lot of discomfort with the kinds of conferences that I was attending and questions about whether my publication outlets were legitimate because people didn't understand that *Women & Therapy* isn't a magazine, it's a peer reviewed journal. So there was a little bit of tension there and there was some concern about how attached I still was with Joan, how much we wrote and worked together but I kind of attributed that to some jealousy. I really was able to be successful and get a lot of name recognition early on because of the foundation I had already set and there were a couple of other heavy hitters in my department that were keeping an eye on what I was doing. It was a little bit contentious in some ways but they hired me to be the feminist psychologist and they gave me a lot of space to do that. They gave me up for women's studies so there were a lot of ways that I felt really supported there too but I felt a little bit misunderstood. Like the PR on campus didn't want to publicize my work because they thought it was too sensitive or too stigmatized. There were enough moments. That was the discrimination question I wanted to answer. That was the one way that I have felt limited because of the nature of my work which other menstrual cycle scholars have shared.

AR – There's still this kind of stigma attached to people talking about menstruation even when it's about promoting your research on it or whatever.

IJR – Yeah, so here's a concrete example of that. The CBC came into my college to interview me for this great documentary and the cameras were there and all the college wanted was to make sure that the students who were going to be in it had signed these release forms. There was no publicity that one of their colleagues was getting all this attention from a pretty big Canadian television station.

AR – The biggest I mean in terms of...

IJR – Yeah, so they really missed an opportunity I think to publicize that and I didn't toot my own horn because I didn't really know how but looking back it was really a missed opportunity because it would have been good for the college.

AR – Absolutely. Well, then thread in for us how this has been working in with your personal trajectory as well...your third child...

IJR – Yeah, I had two kids and they were getting through school and then all of a sudden I had this idea that I wanted to be a kind of late life mom so I had a third child in my early forties who is now five. That was wonderful because I had already gotten tenure, I was really comfortable mothering and then I had this brand new... so there's a good ten year gap... I think it's about ten years, between my second and my third so it was new and familiar at the same time and with the flexibility of faculty schedule I was able to be with her a lot. I was able to mother her in a way I wasn't really able to with the other two kids but still really difficult because they add so much mess and noise and chaos to the whole bit.

AR – Well, let me now move to having you speak more about the specifics of your research. You've done research in a number of areas. Obviously maternity and childbirth and breastfeeding and then also menstruation and a lot seems to me in reviewing some of your work is a lot of do your motivation to do work on menstruation has been to correct this idea that menstruation is this horrible thing, this curse that is always negative. Can you speak about the evolution of your work on menstruation? We'll start with that and weave maybe how you got involved in the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research.

IJR – Yeah, sure. When I got to Fredonia and I had a chance to start up a research program with other graduate students I wanted to revisit my work with menstruation because I hadn't really done much since the Menstrual Joy research. [Interview interrupted by fire alarm]

AR – So you wanted to...well you had done the work on Menstrual Joy at Connecticut College and you wanted to sort of pick up that thread when you got to Fredonia?

IJR – So I started there in 2000 and that was right when there was talk of a new birth control pill that would eliminate menstruation and it was right when there was going to be a meeting for the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research and everybody tries to make sure their research projects line up with that kind of conference so I pulled together three students and we just decided to do

a sort of descriptive oratory study on women's knowledge about that birth control pill and their attitudes towards that idea of eliminating monthly periods and then of course tying in other measures that had to do with objectification and body shame because that's been one of the core threads in my work to really look at the overall shame of the body on these very creaturely bodily functions to see if we can sort of find a connection there. It was a great experience, the students loved the research. I was able to take them with me to Society of Menstrual Cycle Research conference where we were able to present the work and it just led to lots of other opportunities to pursue position statements on that idea which got a lot of press attention which led to these documentaries and interviews with the press. It just sort of took off in a really unexpected way and that's when I got really involved in a leadership capacity with the Society of Menstrual Cycle Research and I got appointed to the board and helped to offer these positions statements on menstrual suppression.

AR – And what were, and tell us about the substance of those position statements. What were you trying to convey with them?

IJR – Really trying to convey to sound the alarm to people just jumping on board to use those pills because we didn't feel like they showed enough data to show they were safe. We were concerned that they were being marketed by portraying this idea that nobody wants to menstruate so why are we still doing this. Trying to get people to weigh the pros and cons with the information that we did have. Really just sort of cautionary.

AR – And what were women telling you about their attitudes towards menstrual suppression while you were doing this work?

IJR – My study was done before all the press started to cover all the options so people didn't know about it. Only a small number of women knew you could eliminate or withdraw bleeding but they were all very curious about it but they listed many concerns about it which I would consider some of the costs or risks that they were identifying but then right after Seasonale was approved, other researchers were finding lots of supports, lots of people attempting the pill so my stuff came out right before it became popular.

AR – Right at the moment.

IJR – Yeah but I didn't find a lot of connections between body shame and wanting to pursue something like this.

{35:40}

AR – Okay.

IJR – There were some attitude correlations but not as much as I had expected.

AR – Interesting. Well, I have some very specific questions that one of my current graduate students wanted me to ask and some of them are actually about shame. She has written: “There’s a significant amount of shame surrounding the topic of menstruation and breastfeeding as well that you’ve explored in research are there approaches that psychologists might consider to address the topic of shame around not just breastfeeding and menstruation but women’s bodies in general and maybe any ideas of how psychologists can intervene in that discourse and change it?”

IJR – That’s a great question and I’m always thinking about implications of my work for health educators, for clinicians, for policy makers but because I’m always in the arm chair I don’t always think that through as careful as I could but yeah, I think starting from a really young age, getting kids to have some body literacy goes a really long way we’re finding that body shame and genital shame really affects sexual decision making... affects sexual satisfaction so I think if there are any opportunities through the schools, through community groups, through parents just start in developmentally appropriate ways, start talking about embracing all facets of your body and getting more comfortable touching your body and understanding how it works, how it feels. I feel that that can go a really long way in all these different domains that’s why I thought about this idea of feelings shame about reproduction in general. Is there a sense of shame about yourself as a leaker of fluids. Something that’s just animalistic or out of control or we make linkages across those areas that incompatible with your sexuality or sexual appeal so I think it’s about consciousness raising and education from a really young age and getting psychologists and physicians to start talk to women about their sexuality and their bodies. It’s really just off the table in a lot of ways. It’s hard to find a social worker or psychologist who specializes in reproductive health and sexuality so people are going to Dr. Oz or Burman. You know, there’s just not a lot of honest dialogue about those interconnections.

AR – Any sense of why... so you mentioned earlier in the interview that when you first started your research on pregnancy there wasn’t a lot of psychological literature on that. Has that changed at all?

{38:33}

IJR – I don’t think so.

AR – Besides your work obviously.

IJR – I don’t think so. Whenever I write a chapter I’m going to feminist sociology, public health, and nursing. Really not. I know every single person that does any work in psychology on women’s health and I’m always trying to connect with them and draw them in to the Society for Menstrual Cycle Research but even in Division 35, I could go to APA, I know Marcie Labelle did one symposium on childbirth and I was in heaven but then since then I have not seen much

emphasis on maternity, women and sexuality or women's health and that's really the professional hall for our feminist psychologists.

AR – Any sense of why? I'm literally just trying to think in my own head why that might be among academic feminists why that hasn't been what you would think would be a runaway topic?

IJR – The students are all interested in embodiment and sexuality. I don't know... maybe we're a little more conservative than we think we are. I mean we get really invested in these hot topics like human trafficking or violence or all kinds of clinical topics but I know Nancy Rousseau and some of the abortion work was really exciting for awhile and that committee has struggled to have momentum and capacity and there has been a lot of resistance to questions of motherhood in the group. None of the presidents have wanted to have a task force on things related to motherhood and you can't just start up a committee easily.

AR – Now that you're speaking of it that way I wonder... well, let me keep focused with a question for you: it seems like that focus on reluctance to motherhood in the US context does not really carry across contexts. I know that in the UK there are a lot of psychologists who work on motherhood.

IJR – Yeah.

AR – Can you account for any of this because of cultural differences in that respect or the ways in which the discipline has developed differently in different places?

IJR – That's such a hard question. Yeah, you're right because when I go to read about childbirth or postpartum depression a lot of it is coming out of Australia or the UK.

AR – Yep and Phoenix... Paula Nicolson.

IJR – Yeah exactly, I love Paula Nicolson. She's one of my favourite authors. I don't know... I think... I think a lot of people think of maternity scholarship as sort of flakey or essentializing or I don't know. I get the sense that that is the sort of stereotype that people have or that women in the US may be in the second wave generation or sort of working hard against the idea of connecting their lives with motherhood so it just doesn't feel like where they want to put their energy for their scholarship. I'm really not sure, it's frustrating.

AR – I wonder... I think you nailed it. I think there's so much effort put on things like leadership and all that stuff that somehow being a mother is seen as being incompatible with that so if we don't really talk about that. It's really an important part of women's lives, most women's lives. Then maybe we can just forge ahead and be like...

{42:00}

IJR – Right, and the health related thing connected to motherhood don't seem to fit in our field either so if you're studying breastfeeding then you must be an epidemiologist or a nurse or a social worker. There's just not a lot of concrete ways that people have connected those... really there's phenomenology attached to breastfeeding and attitudes and there's you know... so maybe the closest thing we have is theories of planned behaviour to try and predict whose going to breastfeed and for how long. Kind of boring stuff, not a lot of feminist...

AR – Right not very phenomenological.

IJR – Right. Yeah so I don't know what that's about. I was really happy to bring that to my students because they were hungry for somebody who did more body work and gender related research. I felt like I really filled in a niche in my department with that kind of research.

AR – So I want to talk with you now about your current position. So you've moved into... well, you've done some higher level administrative work at Fredonia and now you're actually an associate dean at Castleton College. So can you tell us a little bit about how you evolved into a leader?

IJR – Yeah, that's also been a sort of serendipitous... a theme that's been in my trajectory which I love to talk to students about too. Sort of following your nose and trying different things. Yeah, so...as director of women studies my supervisor saw me doing some good things and when this assistant dean position opened up at Fredonia she nominated me to apply for that and I thought it was a joke. I just didn't see myself in that capacity at all and I put my hat in the ring and got the position and I really enjoyed sort of balancing teaching and research with leadership in that capacity and then I got involved in the LIWP [Leadership Institute for Women in Psychology] with Division 35 [Society for the Psychology of Women] and went to their workshops to learn about my own leadership and really enjoyed that work.

AR – So did you decide to do that because you found yourself in a leadership position and wanted to get some tools?

IJR – Yeah... yeah, exactly because Director of Women Studies, I could have done a lot of professional development leadership. I did the NWSA [National Women's Studies Association], pre-conference training for chairs of women studies and that was really interesting too but this was just an opportunity to try the next step in my career and then I got nominated for the HERS Program by my provost and I went to that with one of my colleagues at Fredonia and that was a four weekend long intense women's leadership in academic affairs and professional development activity. That's where I really got the confidence to think of myself as a leader in academic affairs and the identity shift was really difficult. It's still very difficult for me but I sort of felt that I could make that shift.



AR – So the identity shift from being sort of a faculty member researcher to being an academic leader?

{45:08}

IJR – Yeah, really sort of preparing to give up my very hip identity, you know, especially in my area of scholarship which I just felt very attached to and my courses. Just sort of being ready to give that up and sort of be a member of the dark side really. There's just so much suspicion and fear around administration but it was important to me to try and engage in stealth feminism as an administrator; I got that idea from Suzanna Rose. So I just felt ready to make that shift. I got a couple of different job applications out. I really wanted to live in New England because that's where all of our family is from. It was feeling like I was kind of out growing Fredonia and out growing my position and the teaching was wearing me down. Something I wanted to come back to with family. I felt really tired a lot. I wasn't eating well. I wasn't really exercising so I felt like it was sort of burying me in a way and I thought that moving into administration might compartmentalize my day a bit more but I made sure to get promoted to Full Professor before I left because that was a goal I really wanted that all Institute folks were like "You've got to get to Full before you do anything" so that was a huge accomplishment. Something that I'm really proud of. That's my most...

AR – Okay, I was going to ask you that. Something that you feel you are accomplished about.

IJR – That's just so important to me to get that promotion. It's something that my new college doesn't know about me. I try to keep that kind of quiet but personally that was just a really important goal.

AR – Yeah and how was that process at Fredonia in terms of being promoted to Full?

IJR – It was really easy. I just continued to pull together all the evidence from my impact on the field and I had tons of letters from all of the leaders that we worked with and lots of people had cited my work and so it was a really easy process and lots of self reflection of teaching though. Looking back on some of my evals and realizing that that's not my strongest suit which made me feel even better about trying something really different so it was a lot of soul searching in that process actually now that I reflect on it. I felt good about what I could catalogue and demonstrate but it was also weird because it was timed with this desire to leave.