

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Jane Usher

*Interviewed by Leeat Granek
Boston, MA
July 20, 2007*

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JU: Jane Ussher, Interview participant

LG: Leeat Granek, Interviewer

LG: I'll start by asking you some general questions about your feminist identity, then ask a little bit about how you combine your work with your feminism, and do some wrap-up questions about psychology and feminism in general. If there's anything along the way that you want to expand on, or add to or anything I don't mention that you think is important, please feel free, the tangents are often the most interesting part of the interviews. So the first - did you have a question?

JU: No, no.

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

JU: 1983, when I was an undergrad. I'd just finished my undergrad degree, and I had no knowledge of feminism at all. I don't know what sand I got my head stuck in. I read some Andrea Dworkin and that sort of opened a whole sort of world to me, really. I'd just applied to do a PhD in psychology on PMS [Pre-Menstrual Syndrome]. I wanted to do quite a straight social psych PhD, so I sort of developed a parallel life where I was doing straight psychology for the whole three years of my PhD, very experimental work and then developing an increasing feminist sensibility in terms of my personal life, but then linking in to my psychology. So I suppose it was then, kind of early 80s, really. So very much second wave feminism.

LG: Ok and were you involved in any kinds of feminist activities or any kinds of activism at the time? Or was it just something in your personal life?

JU: Around psychology. So I was involved in setting up the Psychology of Women section of the BPS, the British Psychological Society, so linking up with other feminist psychologists which I did when I was a first-year PhD student. And in getting together it became a very strong personal thing because we became very good friends and we had fallings out, as many feminist groups do, as the years went on. So it was both personal and professional. But [there was] a very strong belief in wanting to have an impact on psychology, to develop feminist psychology, to get psychology of women on the agenda. And the U.K. was about 10 years behind the U.S. at that point, so what had already been

established in the U.S. just didn't exist in the U.K. So it was actually 20 years ago exactly that we got the Psychology of Women section.

LG: And was there something specific that was a turning point for you? You said you were applying for a PhD in psychology, but was there something specific that happened in the eighties that raised your feminist consciousness?

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JU: Yes, it was a paper by Mary Parlee that she wrote in 1973 in *Psychological Bulletin* on Pre-Menstrual Syndrome. And I remember really vividly, we had to do a methodology essay critique as a part of our undergraduate degree, and I was fishing around for a paper to review and I was completely bored with psychology. It wasn't what I expected. You know, I was doing it, but I was having a good time as a student, so I was happy as a student, but psychology really wasn't of any interest. And I found this paper and then for the first time it made me think that psychology could be about women. It can speak to me. It can say things that I feel are of interest. And I just remember being so excited. It was a complete moment of epiphany reading this paper. I don't know if you know this paper, but it's a really good critique of PMS as a medical syndrome and she sort of deconstructs PMS as a syndrome. So I decided I wanted to do a PhD on PMS as a result of that. And then got more into the critical work after that. So that was, I suppose, a real turning point. And then just coming across feminist books and starting to read them.

LG: And do you remember what kinds of books you were reading, aside from Andrea Dworkin and...?

JU: A whole bunch of feminist fiction, really. I kind of -read voraciously and don't keep lists of authors. In terms of theory, more liberal, radical feminism - both. A lot of lesbian fiction I was reading at the time, but I wasn't in a lesbian relationship then. It was just like a whole world was out there. And a lot of it was American, so it was, again, about an American way of life which was quite alien to someone living in England in the 80s, so it felt like something I desired. But I kept for a long time that dual path in terms of my academic work, so doing quite straight work and doing the feminist work. And then it was only until the late 80s that I brought the two together, really.

LG: And what originally attracted you to psychology?

JU: Actually, it was because of two things. One was [when] I was an adolescent. My grandfather had a copy of *The Female Eunuch* and I thought that was what psychology was about. And then I had a fantasy - it was going to be about psychoanalysis, that I was going to be thinking about how do peoples' minds work.

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LG: And in the late 80s when you started to merge your feminism with your work, what shape did that take on? So I'm going to ask you specifically about some of your publications and things that you've written. Is there something thematic that you can talk about the way that feminism and psychology has merged for you?

JU: I suppose it's about the positioning of the female body, which is what I'm still doing now, 20 years later, but hopefully in a slightly more sophisticated way. I suppose there were a number of things. One was about challenging the particular paradigms in psychology and the way the woman's body had been pathologized and research has been

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carried out in a very experimental, reductive way, which is actually what I had done in my PhD. So some of it was looking back on what I'd done and reacting to that, and it was reading feminist social constructionist work on sexuality and thinking this is really applicable to PMS and, other than the Mary Parlee paper, I hadn't read anything else at that point which was of some similar ilk so I got very excited about that. In fact, halfway through my PhD, I decided I didn't want to do - I was doing experimental work on women's performance across the menstrual cycle and measuring physiological arousal. Halfway through I didn't want to do it anymore. I wanted to do a feminist constructivist analysis of PMS and my male supervisor, who was actually very good, said to me at the time, "Don't do that, finish your PhD, then do it". So I actually wrote a book, *The Psychology of the Female Body*, which was a reaction against my own PhD in a way. I mean, I suppose after that I never looked back and it was that work that I became known for and got asked to speak about and I was very passionate about. So, I think that makes a difference when your heart's really in something, I really believed it.

LG: And what was it that drew you to that topic, originally, the menstrual cycle, because it was your dissertation topic?

JU: Well, I found the Parlee paper, so that got me into it and then I did my PhD on it. I suppose it was something I could identify myself, in terms of premenstrual changes. And it seemed really interesting as a topic. And I still find it really interesting as a topic because it's got that biological link and is positioned in such a biological way, but also is so socially and culturally located. So I suppose that is really what made me interested in it.

LG: And as you look back on your program of research, what do you see as the major theme? So the body definitely would -be a major...

JU: You mean over the last 20 years?

LG: Yes.

JU: Major themes... Well, I suppose the construction and experience of the body, sexuality. I'm very interested in that and I think that links into reproduction, so it's

reproduction, sexuality, I've done a lot of stuff on women's mental health from a similar perspective, so the way women's madness, women's depression, has been constructed and pathologized. So it's a very similar paradigm to the one that I would take around PMS. I'm hoping to go and do more on that as time goes on.

In recent years I've become more interested in caring. Partly because a lot of PMS work is around women's caring and women's responsibilities and that, leading to distress, which then becomes exacerbated pre-menstrually. And then for serendipitous reasons I've become involved in cancer research and very interested in issues around gender and cancer caring. But I don't see that, although it might seem a strange link, to me there's a

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real, potentially theoretical and epistemological, connection to the work on sexuality and reproduction. A lot of it, I suppose, is about gendered roles and the negotiation of experience within the context of relationships, which is where I'm moving to now, really. I have two big research projects at the moment, funded projects: one on PMS and one on cancer caring. Although they might seem completely different, there are quite a lot of links across them.

LG: That was one of the questions I was going to ask you because I was looking at your C.V. I noticed there's a shift in the last couple of years, turning to cancer care research, but from what you're saying, is that more an emphasis on caring or cancer as its own research topic?

JU: It's less about cancer, really. It's more about gendered experiences of caring, but it happens to be in cancer. I got involved in it because I was actually invited to be. It wasn't something I sat down and thought "Oh I'm going to get involved in cancer research". There's a lot of pressure on us in the U.K., and I imagine in the U.S. as well, to bring in funding, to have research funding. I was invited to be part of a panel of people who were putting forward a research grant on cancer support groups. They wanted someone qualitative so I said "Well I'll go into this just as a very side person and not get involved very much" and then the grant ended up coming to me, just because of politics of universities and things. So I ended up having to run the project, which I was quite annoyed about for awhile, but then actually became very interested in it. And out of that, we then developed another quite big project which we're currently involved with at the moment, which is specifically looking at gender and careers.

So I suppose what I feel I'm doing is I'm molding the cancer research into the sorts of things I am interested in. It's quite a nice contrast in some ways to just doing the women's reproductive health work. But, you know, it's a dilemma in terms of having too many topics and focuses and interests and I have gone off on little tangents throughout the years. I've stopped. And I always advise people starting off to just do one thing and focus on it, so I don't always follow my own advice.

LG: Why do you think that psychologists tend to avoid including an analysis of the body in their research? You're one of the few people who writes about the body in psychology - the people in anthropology, sociology and the other social sciences write a lot about it, but psychologists tend to avoid it. You know, they just don't want to talk about it.

JU: I don't know, it's a good question. I think there's a whole issue about the body equals sexuality. I think that a lot of psychologists shy away from issues which have anything to do with sexuality because it's seen as - and Leonore Tiefer has written some really good work on this - on how people don't want to do sex research because of what that means and how it raises questions about the researchers. I know certainly when I was doing sex research, or research on sexuality, when I was in the U.K., people at conferences would come up to me and ask me personal questions about my sex life which you would never do about any other aspect. You know, if you were doing research about mental health or asthma, people wouldn't come up and assume that you had that issue. So I think that psychologists don't want to have that personal invasion.

LG: That's interesting...

JU: Yeah, and it happened to you on many occasions. And to be honest, it's one of the reasons why I have moved away from it to a degree now. I mean I do still do some research linking into sexuality, but not as much as I did. I think Leonore's work is really interesting on that and the way that psychologists, when they do do research on the body, do it in a very experimental way, as a way of attaining legitimacy as scientists. So, I think there's that aspect of it. I think in terms of more critical psychologists or critical health psychologists, it's seen as reductionist to be looking at the body. So it's the materiality of the body people don't want to look at. But I think there is quite a reasonable amount of stuff on the body.

LG: Starting now, but...

JU: Maybe the whole thing with psychology though is that it has been so focused on cognition and then this move within social psych and critical psych from cognition to language. So it's still very disembodied. I suppose that's one of the things, going back to your question about themes, I would see as a theme through my work, actually bringing the body in. So, developing the material-discursive approach, as in saying that we can't just look at discourse, we've got to look at materiality and experience, but also the intrapsychic. And how we then negotiate an experience, issues intrapsychically is also important because I think that's often left out of discursive work. But I don't know, maybe academics are disembodied in lots of ways. It's a work of the mind and people aren't into their own bodies, I don't know.

LG: Yes, I would definitely agree with you. What do you think, if anything, distinguishes a critical psychologist from a feminist one? Maybe I should back up? How would you define feminist psychology? And then is there a difference between a critical psychologist and a feminist psychologist?

JU: Was it Rebecca West who said “Anyone who doesn’t think a woman is a doormat is a feminist?” So I think it’s an attention to gender, to gendered issues, or you could do that from a non-feminist perspective. It’s a recognition that we still live in a very patriarchal, phallogocentric society, that socially women are very disadvantaged, and psychologically women are often very disadvantaged. Women are more likely to be pathologized. So it’s a recognition of the taken-for-grantedness of those sorts of assumptions. [Feminism is something that says] that gender has to be a part of the equation if we’re looking at experience. If you look the definition of feminism in the journal *Feminism and Psychology*, they also talk about class and race, but I think sometimes we can sound as though we’re being very tokenistic when we put all these things together. I suppose for me it’s about the centrality of gender and experience in terms of what is feminist psychology. It’s taking women’s accounts seriously. It’s the

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importance of the woman’s voice, which lends much more towards qualitative research. Being reflective about our own experience and what we bring to the research in terms of our interpretations of the data, the questions that we ask, how we see the world. So, I suppose that to me, in a nutshell, is what feminist psychology would be.

Then, it’s also critical. So, I suppose that links with your earlier question. It’s critical of the taken-for-grantedness in psychology, of the existing paradigms. I wouldn’t define feminist psychology as having to be qualitative because I think we should use the methodologies that are appropriate to the research questions. We can be quite powerful in using mixed methods, or different methods, if it meets a feminist end.

LG: You were talking very eloquently about that today.

JU: I think that that’s something other feminist psychologists don’t agree with, but I don’t feel we should limit ourselves in that way. I think we can be much more politically effective sometimes when using quantitative methods. As long as you don’t position them as better than, or elevate them above, qualitative methods and that’s why to use a critical realist approach, epistemologically, makes sense to me. In terms of what makes a critical psychologist, I actually used to run a Master’s in critical psychology in Sydney. I think critical psychs share a lot of the same sorts of assumptions, but there isn’t such a focus, necessarily, on gender. So there are lots of critical psychologists, say here at this conference, who don’t take a gender perspective, but who would adopt many of the other perspectives I talked about in terms of questioning taken-for-grantedness and the importance of subjective experience. I suppose what’s common to both is, from the sort of feminist psychology I would take up, is recognizing that experience is culturally and historically located and that those who are in power, who define what is to be, are often men and they come from a very particular paradigm. So, I suppose that’s what a feminist would say and a critical psychologist might not emphasize the men.

I would say there are critical psychologies, plural. What they would have in common would be challenging positivism as a dominant paradigm in psychology and questioning

taken-for-granted truths about how we do psychology. You know, for example, that we need to be neutral observers, that we need to be objective, that we need to meet validity and reliability, that quantitative methods are better than qualitative, those sorts of things that we get taught, or I certainly got taught. And that to have the voice of the person, to be subjective, is to be biased. Critical psychologists would question that. A lot of critical psych's are really political in terms of their activities, personally and in psychology.

LG: That's a lot to think about. Your C.V. indicates that you've worked as the Director of PsyHealth {18:00} in the Gender, Culture and Health Research unit. Can you tell me a little bit about this department, how you got involved in it? I noticed that was on your slide today. What is Psyhealth?

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JU: Well, I'm in a mainstream psych department and PsyHealth is a research group within the department that I set up with some colleagues four or five years ago now. It's really quite a small group. We've got a reasonable number of research assistants and PhD students now, but in terms of the academic stuff, it's a relatively small group. It's really a group where we wanted to incorporate colleagues within the department who aren't just doing work on gender, so that's why it's gender, culture and health. Nearly all of my work and my colleagues' work has a health focus. I suppose it's broadening out what I've talked about in terms of what is a feminist and a critical psychologist, but it's a space where there are other psychologists that link in with us that would be positioned as more mainstream psychs. You could argue that what I'm doing is a slow process of indoctrination. It's a creation of a space where we can actually be tolerant and respectful of different research paradigms and perspectives.

LG: Is it all health psychology research?

JU: Yes, although some of the psychologists could be considered social health. What's happened is that it's actually led to most of the researchers now using qualitative methods whereas previously, they would have just done quantitative. So, we're actually encouraging and teaching them to use qualitative methods and more critical approaches, but without actually positioning them as critical. I don't know if that's subversive or weak.

When you say "critical psychology", people become very threatened, certainly in mainstream psychology. Whereas if you actually talk about the ideas and concepts, people are quite happy about it. That's my experience and that's the approach that I take about it these days. I didn't used to. When I was younger I used to be very confrontational and I'd get a lot of pleasure from that, but I just don't do that anymore. I do it in a much more "this is what we do" and "this is what it's about" and they think "oh yeah, that's really good". So it means that I actually do research that's got mainstream funding: the Australian Research Council, which is the most prestigious funding in Australia, and I've also got Cancer Council funding and they're actually funding quite

critical psychological research. But if I push it as critical psych research, it doesn't get funded, which is my experience of colleagues in England and Australia.

LG: You've had a prolific career in publishing books and articles. Which publication do you think has had the most impact? And which do you feel the most proud of, do you like the most? Or are they the same, and if not, why?

JU: I don't know which has had the most impact. I think my first book, *The Psychology of the Female Body*, was taken up a lot, but probably the book, *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*... I don't know. I still get asked to do a lot of stuff on women's mental health and I haven't written a lot on it. That book was published in 1991 and I've written chapters since that, but that's been on the basis of that book and people asking if I will write a chapter. In terms of what I'm most proud of, it's actually my most recent book because it feels like where I'm at now. It was the hardest to write. Although

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the book before that, *Fantasies of Femininity*, took me the longest to write. It took me five years to write because I was going through a big change personally at the time. I got involved in huge reading of literature outside of psychology which I find really fascinating, but then actually bringing them back together in the book.

LG: What made *The Monstrous Feminine* so hard to write? You said it was the most difficult to write.

JU: I don't know, I think when I moved from England to Australia, I broke what was almost a continuous stream of writing a book, and I stopped. I think I was really burnt out when I came to Australia, so it was sort of a personal change, really. I think getting back on again was a bit like falling off a horse and getting back on again. It was quite hard. I'd had the book contract for quite a few years and I just couldn't write it. So what I did do is I wrote a series of papers. I thought, ok I'll just write a paper and then it ended up being that probably about half the book was the papers brought together and reworked. So I kind of got a lot of it done and then I could actually do it. So I don't know, maybe the reason I found it hard to write was a personal thing, that I was just actually wondering could I go back into doing this again?

Also, it was different from the other books I've written because I've drawn on a lot of empirical data in it, which I hadn't in the other books. So, in some ways, they were easier because they were more polemical. Whereas what I was trying to do [in this book] was to draw on empirical data and research that I'd been doing, but not present it in a really dry journal article type way. So, write it in the same, what I was trying to make an engaging way, but then have the data there. So, it was quite hard to do actually. But I loved doing it. I found it really challenging, but once I got into it I really enjoyed doing it, but it was quite hard to do. I always find it hard to stop when I'm writing a book. I wanted to go on with this because we were in the middle of this big PMS study, which

was really relevant to the book and we'd also been doing some research on women in mid-life which was another of the chapters in the book. So if I'd had another year to do the book, I would have actually brought more data in, but then it would have been a different book. It would have been a bigger book and I would have been even later on my deadline, so it became something I just had to stop at a certain point.

LG: I notice on your C.V. too that you sit on several editorial boards for academic journals and you have that Routledge series of books. Can you tell me a little bit about what some of those experiences were like for you? What journal do you like most to work on and anything that stands out for you about those experiences?

JU: To be honest, a lot of the editorial board is in name only. I do review a lot of articles for a whole range of journals. I used to be very inefficient at getting the papers back, so I didn't get so many, but I've become more efficient, so now I've got a stream of them to do. That's not exactly what you're asking, but that experience I now actually really enjoy doing. I used to hate doing it, but now I do it quite quickly and efficiently and quite like giving feedback to people, making constructive comments about how people can

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revise their research. I think I really rarely suggest a rejection of a paper. I think that's very, very unusual. I tend to write incredibly detailed comments on papers about what people should do. I suppose I quite like that. I never know who the people are. Sometimes you can guess, but usually you can't. So it's an interesting process, really.

I've been publishing much more in journals in recent years because there's a lot of pressure on us to do so and I really find the process of getting reviewers comments back incredibly helpful, myself. And the way I revise my own papers, having gotten reviewers comments, I always find it better. Even though it can be really annoying and getting rejections is horrible, usually the revision of the paper is usually much better than the paper was in the first place. So, I suppose I try and give that back.

In terms of the book series, that's actually been going for a very long time because it took a long time for the first books to come out. It's probably been going for about 17 or 18 years. So, to me now, it's amazing that there are so many books in the series and I get people approaching me a lot now saying "Can I put a book in the series?" whereas, at the beginning, it was me chasing people and asking people, you know, trying to get it going. But I really enjoy doing that and one of the things I've got great pleasure from is seeing younger women psychologists and saying "Would you like to do a book in this series?" That's how I actually got started in the first place when I was a PhD student doing my straight psychology: I did a paper, which became the basis of *The Psychology of the Female Body*, really. It was a construction of reproductive disorders. I did it as a conference paper and I loved doing it. It felt really subversive because I was reading all this social constructionism of feminism and it was so opposite to my experiments where I was doing measurements of skin conductance and such things. So, I gave this paper at the conference and Valerie Walkerdine, who was the editor of the Critical Psych series,

came up to me at the end of the conference and said “Will you do a book in my series?” and I was a PhD student, so it was like the most amazing thing to happen. So I get pleasure from actually being able to do that myself now to people and say “You know, this is really interesting work” and “Have you thought about writing a book on it?” I think you need sometimes, and I think women in particular, although maybe less so today, somebody else to give them that validation and say “Well this is possible”.

LG: That was my next question - asking about teaching philosophy, mentoring philosophy. Who were your mentors?

JU: Well, actually, I don't teach anymore. I just do research. When I did teach, when I felt I taught the best and really had a teaching philosophy that I was enabled to carry out, was in my first academic job when I was quite young. I did my PhD straight from uni[versity] and actually did three years clinical psych training and then went straight to an academic job. So, I got an academic job, probably about seventeen years ago, in the late 80s. I was teaching at Sussex University which was a very liberal, with a small “L”, university and very progressive university. It had been set up in the 1960s and in the late 80s it was still that very socialist, multi-disciplinary, innovative teaching based on seminars, not on lectures. There were lectures, but they were optional. [There was] lots of attention to

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the students, lots of encouragement of mature students, lots of emphasis on feminism and gay issues and culture. So, it was like heaven when I got the job there. And I developed psychology of women courses, which I taught in a small group way, encouraging people to be critical. I got lots of eminent feminist and other critical psych's down to give lectures to the students. So, it was about introducing them to ideas. I was quite close in age to the students as well, so I think I was really engaged and excited. It felt like the most privileged thing to be doing. So I suppose, in terms of teaching philosophy, it was about engagement, engaging the students, about passion, getting them to be passionate, about being critical, but also allowing them to think and develop their own ideas, so encouraging them. I loved it and I had really good relationships with the students, actually, when I look back on it.

I then moved into University College London which is a very straight, very male, traditional, old psych department and it was just completely the opposite. It was all about lectures. It was about facts. I was there as a social psychologist, strangely, so I used to teach feminism as social psychology and got away with it for years until we had a couple of male external examiners who came in and said this isn't social psychology. It actually coincided with me leaving the department.

LG: And what about mentoring philosophy?

JU: I think mentoring, particularly graduate students, PhD students, has been a really important part of my academic career. I haven't always got it right. I think I get it pretty

much right now, most of the time, or as well as you can. I think when you've got this notion of good enough mothering, good enough supervising is how I would see it now. So I suppose I've changed my philosophy on that because of my experiences. I had a male supervisor, who was actually very good, but I saw very little of him, so almost in the sense of a deprived child. So, I suppose I wanted to give to women - I was going to say younger women, but they haven't always been younger than me - to be able to give them a good experience of supervision, to nurture and mentor them, to give them things, so to introduce them to conferences, to editing books that they have chapters in there. Pushing them, actually, to excel, to think, to do well.

My downside was I got very disappointed with students who didn't achieve that and I think I was too attached, is the way I'd look at it now, when I look back at my experiences in England. I got very personally involved with students as well. I was trying to adopt a - what at the time I would have positioned as a feminist model of supervision - which was very blurred in terms of boundaries. I've subsequently realized if you engage in that sort of work, it becomes very dangerous, and there's lots of good writing on that, as I'm sure you know. It was very much about being open about my personal life. I used to go out drinking with students, which is a kind of British thing to do and was wanting to treat them as equals. You know "They're as good as me, they're the same as me". The reality is they weren't the same as me. I was their supervisor and I was in a tenured academic job. They were students and I had the ability to evaluate them and say yea or nay.

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I had an experience where a couple of PhD students - when it came to a point where I effectively said to them that their work wasn't good enough and they needed to pull their socks up - just were completely devastated by this and relationships broke down quite severely. And that was a very difficult experience for me, personally and professionally because it kind of reverberated for a while. Through it, I stopped supervising for awhile. When I came to Australia I still had PhD students, but I almost went to the other extreme. I became very distant and would write down everything that happened in supervision and would make students sign it at the end of the supervision. I became this almost authoritarian figure.

I think where I am now is the "good enough supervisor". I'm engaged with the students, but I don't socialize with them. I don't tell them things [about my personal life]. I mean, I've got a dog that I bring to work. They know I've got a dog and my partner works with me, so they know my partner, but in terms of my personal angst or issues, I wouldn't see it as appropriate to talk about that with my students, whereas I used to. And I look back on that as an awkward supervision. I thought it was feminist supervision at the time. And I'm not attached as much as I can be to their performance, which, ironically, they seem to do better. I'm not so invested. It's their success or failure. I'm there for them and I comment, but I give them more space. Whereas I think, before, if they weren't performing at the level I wanted [them] to be, I'd jump on them and would be quite agitated with why weren't they doing what I thought they could do or I could do. Now I

think they need that space to grow. So I think through a lot of pain, I'm actually a much better supervisor. And I think I've had four or five PhD students complete in the U.K. and I've had about eight in Australia.

LG: So you're doing something good.

JU: It seems to work, actually. I think it's really interesting - and I have actually talked to other feminist psychologists about similar experiences that they've had with students. I think it's a painful process to go through and I remember somebody saying to me, you know, this was 10 years ago now when I lived in the U.K., and somebody said to me "It's terrible we have to just keep reinventing the wheel" that "This has been going on for generations and generations and yet we still fall into that trap as feminist supervisors". I think, thinking that as feminists, we can be equal to our students, and then we're not. And then when we take up that position of power in relation to our students, which we have, it's experienced as incredibly traumatic. You see, I now understand it from the perspective of the student, but when I was doing it 10 years ago, it was like, you know, "Hang on".

LG: And what about your own mentors? Have you had any mentors? You said Valerie Walkerdine offered you the...

JU: Yeah, Valerie is very important to me. She offered me that contract in her book series. I don't know if she's published many in that series. I think it didn't go on very long because she's so involved in other things. But it was one of the introductory titles in the series and that was incredible, actually. I really like Valerie's work. I think she does incredibly good work. I came to Australia because of Valerie. She got a job in Sydney

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and asked me to come and work in Sydney. I hadn't had a personal relationship with her over those years. I'd met her at conferences. I always used her as a reference, a referee, but it's not like I had socialized with her and become a friend of hers. I came and worked with her and, for various reasons, we didn't get along working together, which was quite devastating, really. I think I experienced some of the things, in relation to Valerie, that I'd been doing with students myself. I'm an ex-Catholic, so it felt a bit like God was visiting upon me what I had visited upon other people. I then learnt a lot through it, quite painfully. I think we were both there on our own, setting up a department, and it was just too much. It was too intense. So, that was quite difficult because it was someone who I really looked up to, but we then personally kind of clashed.

In terms of other people, Wendy Hollway is someone whose work I really admire and, again, was very significant, as a more senior psychologist. When we were setting up the Psychology of Women section, she was someone who had been very involved in first wave feminism, or feminism in the 60s. Sometimes we'd be all young and enthusiastic and she'd say "Oh you know, we've done this before". But she was really also very supportive. She's someone I still, well, I wouldn't call her a friend, but she comes out to

Australia sometimes and she's still doing really good work. She's coming up to retirement now.

LG: So what is the Psychology of Women section that you set up, you said in the British Psychological Society?

JU: It's the equivalent of Division 35 in the APA [American Psychological Association].

LG: What was that process like, setting that up?

JU: Passionate. Drunken. Difficult at times. It was a process of a bunch of women coming together and meeting every few years. We set up an Issues of Women in Psychology Society. We ran conferences, had meetings and had lots of vegetarian food because we were vegetarian at the time. We used to drink lots of wine and, you know, became very close friends. That bunch of women became almost my closest friends in my life. And then we all fell out. Well, not all fell out, but there were various [issues], as happens in feminist organizations, sadly. Some people got involved in relationships with each other, so, sexual relationships with each other, and they kind of left and then fell out.

LG: Is the section still going?

JU: Oh yeah, yeah, it's still going. The conference is actually on right this minute, this week. They're having a 20th anniversary conference.

LG: Wow, we didn't even hear about it in Canada.

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JU: Janet Stoppard's been to various conferences. It's much smaller than Division 35.

LG: This is a Division 35 project.

JU: Oh, ok. So, it is the equivalent of Division 35, but it is much smaller. But that was very empowering because we actually got the establishment to recognize it and take us seriously and give us a place within the establishment. And when it was set up, it was exactly 20 years ago, it was very radical. Now, I think it's more mainstream. It's interesting. I think there's less members of it now because I think then feminism was bigger. It felt more challenging. I think there were a lot of the younger women psychologists [who] were really into feminism, whereas my experience is that they're not so much these days. But it was great. It was a really significant thing in my life, actually. [It was] very distressing when, for various political things or personal things, things broke down. I don't know if you've read Susie Orbach and Luise Eichenbaum's book, *Bittersweet*, I think that account of what happened at Women's Therapy Centre and the kind of relationships there was really similar to some of the experiences that we had together as a group of women. What seems to be the sad inevitability of those feminist group actually fracturing.

LG: I've heard that before in some of the other interviews as well. What would you like to see happening in the field of psychology, in terms of the research that you do? So, for example, you just mentioned you see less feminist women in the field now. Is that something you notice happening with the other kinds of research that you do as well?

JU: I notice very few students wanting to take up an overt feminist position and that I notice, even graduate students wanting more to identify as critical psychologists, rather than feminist psychologists, which I think is quite interesting. There's a number of women psychologists here at the conference that I've known as post-grads, PhD students of other colleagues, and who, at some point, definitely would have been identified as feminist psychologists and I don't hear any of them calling themselves that now. I mean maybe it's just such a taken-for-grantedness. I think that's quite interesting. I often don't name myself as a "feminist psychologist" anymore. I mean, I did actually today in the paper on cancer caring, which is quite unusual for me. So, I suppose, on the one hand, you could say that's a good sign because feminism has had such an impact, it's taken for granted and we don't need it anymore. On the other hand, you could say, it's the opposite: that it's become marginalized, we're in the post-feminist age. You know, this is just boring, it's a yawn, and we don't want to hear all of this.

So, I suppose, in terms of what I'd like, is for the issues that feminist psychology has always been looking at to be taken seriously and see that they're not solved. The issues in terms of women's lives and the way women are positioned in society and the experiences they have are still so gendered. There's still so much discrimination against women and so much inequality, arguably more so. So, I think to have a space for that to be there, without people being seen as old-fashioned and hackneyed.

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LG: What kind of barriers, obstacles, discrimination have you experienced because of your feminism, because of being a woman in the field, if any?

JU: Oh, I could go on forever. Well, it's hard to know what is to do with being a woman and what is to do with being a feminist. When I was doing my PhD, which, as I said, was a really straight PhD, my supervisor advised me that I should stick with doing something like memory – he does memory research. Well, he did. He's retired now. [He said] that doing feminist research would be really damaging for my career and that I should do some straight psych. And I have, at various points throughout my career, thought he's probably right, but I never took his advice and never for a moment regretted that I didn't take his advice. In fact, I was defiant in a slightly adolescent way that I wasn't going to, but also, I really believed in what I was doing.

I think when I was younger, the passion and belief I had in feminist psychology actually overruled whatever potential discrimination that was there. And I think there's something about the passion and confidence of the young, which is incredibly... I was going to say seductive, but that makes it sound sexualized. It's empowering, incredibly

empowering for the person and I think it can really get you places. I don't have it to the same degree anymore, which I don't regret, actually. So, in some ways, at the point where I was becoming a feminist psychologist, it was actually a plus. And there have been people who have subsequently said that that whole bunch of us that set up the Psychology of Women section, we're all professors now. Which, still, statistically, for women to be full professors, is unusual, so, on that level, we haven't done badly out of it.

On the other hand, I think that it's led to a lot of personal angst and discrimination and nastiness, for all of us, but I'll talk about myself. The last department I was in, in England, was incredibly patriarchal. I continuously had to do twice as much as the men, which is the classic story about women. I had to publish twice as much. I had more PhD students, I had more grants than most of my colleagues. I was writing books at the same time, still doing a full teaching load, and I still wasn't as good as them. I was just completely burnt out. So, I think that passion had actually got me down a path, which is why I say I don't regret I haven't got it anymore because I now ease off. I have a life, much more than I did then. Work was my life in those days, and I think it had to become, to be able to be equal to the men. And certainly the feminist psychologists I was close to at that time were the same, so we worked and lived and breathed feminist psychology and that's why we were such close friends. But you're still never good enough.

LG: Can you think of any other specific examples of the kind of discrimination you may face? It's always a kind of general, overarching discrimination. Can you think of something specific?

JU: Course material being seen as not legitimate, not good enough. Linking back to what I was saying about PhD students. I had a very specific thing that happened to me in my last department with a PhD student who I'd been encouraging, nurturing and

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mentoring, and supporting whose work was not as strong as it could be. I was quite critical of her work and perhaps did it in a way which wasn't as kind as it could have been. I think I was doing it as an academic judgment, this is what I'm subject to, this is what you know... So I think that she was completely devastated by this and then turned against me. And in the department I was in, she was just completely supported to get me. So, I felt a bit like I was an armadillo and that I was known as the hard woman in this department because it was like "Right you bastards, you're not going to get me". You know, I was a feminist. It was really a very aggressive department. I think it still is. To survive you had to be as aggressive as the men, so the staff meetings were like a bear pit. And I could give as good as I could get. I wasn't scared of any of them. But they got me through my student. So, I felt like through my soft underbelly...and I won't go into the details. It was quite distressing. You know, she was actually, I would say, encouraged in making complaints. She went to my head of department and said I had made these criticisms about her work. She felt it was personal. It wasn't. He told her to make a formal grievance, which she, of course, did, which then became this whole formal process. Then there was nothing there, because there was nothing. So it then turned into

this whole witch hunt, really, which got bigger and ended up in the National Press, actually, in the U.K. It was really nasty. So that's the most specific example and I would locate that in my being a woman and a feminist and also, I'd come out as a lesbian at that point, so I think that was all part of it. It became quite central to it. I was accused of having confessed to being a lesbian to this student, when I was completely open about it. But then that became part of this positioning and othering of me. You know, over the years, subsequently I've thought "God if I was, you know, a heterosexual, married and doing memory research, none of that would have happened". But then, I wouldn't be in Australia now and I'm happy with that.

LG: I noticed that one of your publications was on sexism in psychology, subtitled, "Keeping women on the outside". What drew you to write this paper and what was its impact?

JU: That was a very long time ago. That was probably about 1990, is it? I think it was a paper partly around that issue of setting up the Psychology of Women section, that psychology was sexist. I can't remember what was in the paper now, but I imagine what it's about was talking about the subject matter of psychology being very sexist, pathologizing women, but also the power hierarchies in psychology being very male. So that women are on the outside basically as academics, as people who have power to decide what is the discipline and to make the nature of the discipline, but also as participants in research, the way that we're positioned and framed. The two obviously link together. So I'm sure that's what that paper was about. I was drawn to it because that's what I was so passionate about at the time.

LG: And part of what you were experiencing at the time, it sounds like.

JU: Yeah, although I didn't, as [a] younger academic psychologist, I didn't personally get that discrimination. So, I think, in some ways, personally I didn't get into this from a position of being discriminated against. I was actually quite cherished as a post-grad student. I was the only full-time PhD student in my department, so I had all the members of staff who would give me time and supervision. I was actually like a very cherished child, in lots of ways, as a student. It was later, when I was more successful and known and I think, then, very threatening to the man. I remember when I went for a promotion as a senior lecturer, in England, which was quite hard to get in that particular department. I'd got a whole bunch of publications. I'd got three books. I'd got research grants. I'd got loads of research students through, and my head of department said to me "You need two more major research grants to get promoted to senior lecturer". I was really annoyed about this and said "But you know I've done all this... I've done these books," and he said, "Yeah, Jane, book editors like you, publishers like you, but I want to know that research grant bodies like you". So, I got two more grants and I went back to him a year later and said "Right you bastard, I've got it now". I was engaging with that challenge, in fighting back and getting there, but, of course, I think what I'd now say, is that that's actually very threatening because they set these standards for you that they don't think you're going to meet so they can keep you down. If you then meet them, it's very

threatening. So, it was only when I became more successful that actually then I was really discriminated against. And I know, having talked to, particularly North American feminist colleagues, who have a really difficult time getting tenure, but because it doesn't work like that in England or Australia, it's like once you're in a job, you're safe. I got a tenured job straight away as a young academic and was free to do things. I became threatening as I could get those signs of academic success that the men were competing for and wanting. When I was getting them too, I think that was too much for them. That's my theory.

LG: How have you balanced the demands of your personal life with your professional life?

JU: If you'd asked me that 10 years ago, I'd say very badly. And now, I'd say extremely well. I used to work all the time. I used to love it, but I did have a life. I had a partner and used to socialize, but work was my priority. Certainly in previous relationships, I used to say work is the most important thing, which I now think an appalling thing to say to your partner. After stuff that happened to me that I've alluded to, or talked about, in England...two things happened at the same time. I had those difficulties in the department I was in. I felt very devastated by them. I was actually very traumatized by them at the time, very disappointed in students who I had mentored and supported going for me. I couldn't get my head around it for a long time. But then Valerie also offered me the job in Australia and I went to Australia, which just felt like I had arrived on another planet. It was glorious. It was warm and it was by the beach and people were friendly. It was like being given a second chance of life, really. I was determined to be different, which I have been. I had various points where I got lured back into working too much, but now I have a really balanced life. I never work at weekends, unless I really, really have to. I mean, occasionally, if I have a deadline or something, I will. But I don't work at weekends. I don't work evenings. I'm in a really privileged job. I don't have any teaching or admin, I just do research. And I have a lot of research responsibility. I have pressure to get grants, hence the cancer research. So, you know, there's a cost to it. But, yeah, I feel like my life is actually more important than my work now.

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LG: And what advice could you give to a feminist woman working in psychology now?

JU: You mean somebody starting off? Or any feminist?

LG: Sure, someone starting off. You can answer it any way you wish.

JU: I think what I'd say to anybody is to follow your passion. Do what you're passionate about. Don't compromise too much. Most of us have to compromise at certain levels, but be aware when you're compromising and put the breaks on when you think you're compromising too much. Believe in what you're doing and do what you believe in and you'll do well. Doing things so you can get somewhere, for purely

instrumental reasons, you end up feeling like you sold your soul. It'll feel like prostitution and you probably won't get anywhere anyway. And if you do, will you feel good about yourself?

When I first went to my job in the horrendous department in England, I was given advice by Tim Shallice, a very eminent neuropsychologist, an internationally-known neuropsychologist. He's a very, very straight psychologist and he was the research professor in the department at the time. I went to him, wanting to do well, [to see] what advice he could give me. And that's what he said to me "Follow your passion". So, in a way, it's not a feminist piece of advice, it's a piece of good academic advice. I think for women who are feminists personally, there's a tendency to try and do the straight stuff to get legitimacy and I'd say don't do it. Have the courage of your convictions, if you can and to do what you believe in. And it will be alright. In a sense "have faith". It might sound a bit religious, but it will be alright.

If I think about the work of mine, at various points in my career, I haven't followed that advice myself. I have done things for strategic reasons, for instrumental reasons or to prove I'm good enough and none of that work gets cited or quoted. It's the work that I'm passionate about, that my heart was in, that I didn't see as the serious, the real stuff, the straight stuff, that's the work that's had influence. So, I suppose that's the best bit of advice I could do.

I suppose the other things that are really important are about having support from other feminists and/or from other colleagues. I think one can get a lot of support from people who are not necessarily identified as feminists. So, to have a supportive academic community and spaces like this conference where you can actually talk about your work without people questioning the fundamentals of what you're doing, like "Why qualitative research?" or "Why women?". So I think those sorts of things are really important. And I think also, I would say now, to have a life. Have a partner, or dogs, or children if you want children. To be able to switch off for a minute. And I think that the feminist psychologists that I would really like to be my mentor now, are the ones that seem to

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have incredibly rich lives as well as a really strong belief in their feminism. And I don't want to name, but you might have interviewed some of them. I'm sure you have. But they're the sort of women I find inspiring. That's the advice I'd give to somebody now.

I think it's harder when you're starting out. You know, it's easy for me to say that because I spent years and years working with long hours and weekends and evenings and then that got me to a position where I can now have more freedom and space. You know, what I say to my PhD students and postdocs that I supervise is "Work hard, but have a life". Well, I don't need to tell them to get a life, they have a life. But I think also, if they're serious about it, they need to work longer hours. And that's the difficult one I think, but then it's up to them, really, whether they want to do it or not. You have to have the passion to do it.

LG: Ok, two more questions. What inroads have feminists made in psychology? And, what roadmaps were made?

JU: I think feminists have made huge inroads across the whole discipline of psychology, but then, as with feminism in society, it's not often recognized as being feminist now. You know, going from Carol Gilligan's work on moral development, to critical social psychological work, which is looking at the construction of gender, which then has a whole impact on the construction of experience. I would say feminist psychology has been instrumental in the development of critical psychology, but isn't often acknowledged as such. I think in terms of moving us away from a biological reductionism and that as being the unquestioned norm, although in certain areas, it still is. I think in terms of what inroads, in many psych departments, feminism doesn't exist. You're still a pariah if you're a feminist psychologist. I think that, as in society there's a big backlash against feminism, a lot of really bright young women students still want to do the really straight, mainstream stuff and, you know, be one of the boys in that way, in every way. So I think, as in society, there's huge inroads still to be made. Both of those questions you could talk about for hours, really. I'm getting a bit exhausted.

LG: Ok, ok, then let's end. Is there anything that I haven't mentioned that you feel is important for me to know about yourself, your career, psychology, feminism in psychology? Is there anything that I have mentioned or haven't mentioned that you want to talk about or want me to know?

JU: Not particularly. I mean, I'll probably think of things later. I suppose one of the things which is important is that feminism is different across different countries and different cultures. I think North American feminism and British feminism are quite close, but not the same. But if you then look at French feminism, it's very, very different. Feminism in other non-English speaking countries is quite different. Australian feminism is probably quite close to British and the U.S. But I think the experiences are different and I suppose we need to be careful not to say feminism in psychology, but feminisms, and that there is more than one form of feminism, both within a cultural context, but also across cultures. And the philosophical basis of the research is quite different. British

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feminist psychology tends to be quite post-structuralist, less so in the U.S. French feminism has, as I'm sure you know, come from a different philosophical basis altogether. So I think that's an important issue and therefore, the groups that feminists ally themselves with are then potentially quite different. The British feminist psychs will now ally themselves with critical psychology and a lot of it is discursive post-structuralist psychology. Whereas, my experience of American feminism, mainly from reading, is that it tends to be much more political and much more about political activism. Certainly, the research work is from a different research paradigm. So, I think that's actually quite a big difference. We don't necessarily speak the same language as each other across different countries.

LG: Ok, thank you so much.

JU: That's alright, my pleasure.

LG: It was a wonderful interview.

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