

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Leeat Granek
Tel Aviv, Israel

Interviewed by A. Rutherford
Dryden, NY
April 27th, 2015

When citing this interview, please use the following citation:

Granek, L. (2015, April 27). Interview by A. Rutherford. [Video Recording]. Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. Toronto, ON.

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

Alexandra Rutherford, PhD
Project Director, Psychology's Feminist Voices
alexr@yorku.ca

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2015

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Leeat Granek
Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Tel Aviv, Israel
April 27, 2015

LG – Leeat Granek

AR - Alexandra Rutherford

AR - Welcome to your formal Psychology's Feminist Voices oral history interview. If I could have you state your full name and place and date of birth for the record.

LG - Ok. Leeat Granek and I was born in Montreal, Quebec, September 25th, 1979.

AR - Let me start with our first question - if I could get you to tell me a little bit about the emergence and development of your identity as a feminist.

LG - So I think - I will answer this question in two ways. I think my feminist identity developed formally and informally. In terms of informally, I was a feminist before I knew what feminism was. So, I grew up in a home where there were some pretty typical gender power dynamics between my mom and dad. So my mom was mostly a stay at home mom for most of my life and then actually after she was diagnosed with cancer- I was about nine years old when she got diagnosed with cancer - and at that point something started to shift in terms of the dynamics. Partly based on her own mortality and thinking about what she wanted to do for the rest of her life she changed some of the dynamics in the house. But up until that age and all through my formative years as a teenager, the power dynamic was unequal. My dad was the one working outside of the home, my mom was the one who was inside the home and he really controlled all of the financial resources, which were limited. I grew up in a house where people were not financially stable until many, many years later. I was a teenager when we were a bit more financially stable. And even as a child, I had this sense of this deep injustice between what my mom was experiencing at home and what I saw my dad doing outside in the world. So I really saw that playing out in the dynamics at home and thought that there was something very unjust about that and thinking that I wanted something else. I really wanted independence.

My mom's way of approaching things, which was so different than my own, she would say to me, "You can always" - and I think this is sometimes good advice, I have to say that now many years later, I feel that some of this is useful for me because I began to learn this, but she said, "you can just go around. You don't always need to engage head to head with everything. Sometimes you can let people [at home, at school etc.] say what they need to say and just go around." I thought that was outrageous - even as a kid. But why would I do that? I really felt it was important to stand up for myself, and what I wanted and to be able to articulate what I

wanted. But in a way I think I was fighting her fights, you know? So, I think part of that was me sort of fighting for her.

AR - Your way of standing up for her.

LG - Yeah. I don't know if I was conscious of it at the time, but in retrospect I think I was fighting for the both of us. I did talk to my mom about it, but she had a different approach {4:12}. I think she had a more typically gendered approach, which is to be a little more manipulative or a little bit under the radar or to "go around" and get what you wanted in a different way. I just thought that that was really outrageous, I was really angry about that. I couldn't understand why she would do that. Why couldn't she just say what she wanted? But of course, saying what you wanted clearly - there was a lot of conflicts. I think the other thing was watching my mom be so dependent, financially, and in the home her insecurities and her low sense of self-esteem. I just wanted independence. It is very, very important to me. So I think in that sense there was something very feminist, but I didn't know it at the time.

AR - It wasn't articulated in that way for you at the time.

LG - I just had no frame of reference to understand feminism. I come from a working-class background, my parents read a lot, but there wasn't an intellectualism in the house. They were very, very intelligent people, but it wasn't an intellectual, academic environment and we didn't have these conversations about feminism or anything like that. But then around the age of fifteen or sixteen, this is when a more formal identity developed, I read *The Beauty Myth* by Naomi Wolf. Yeah. And it was just mind blowing for me. Like most teenagers and most people around me at the time, most of the young women around me, I had difficulties with my body. I hated how I looked, I was struggling with my weight. Just everything about my appearance was - it took up so much space and energy and time. It was so important. It took a lot of space. And when I read this book I understood for the first time, and I made this connection between capitalism and sexism and patriarchy and all these kind of political agendas, political corporate agendas that were shaping me and how I felt about myself and my body - that made me very angry. It just gave me a whole different view about how this was not an individual issue. It wasn't just about hating my body, but about all of these other social forces around that were affecting the way I was feeling. I made a decision at that moment. I remember when I had the realization that first of all I was going to stop hating my body. That was the number one - that was my first feminist act. That I was just going to accept my body exactly as it was. At any given time, no matter what it looked like. And then I would ask the women around me to also stop saying denigrating things about their bodies because it made me feel bad about myself. And I would say to them, "I don't want to hear this because it makes me feel bad about myself. So if you need to say it, say it to yourself." There was something about that that got me interested in feminism. I began reading more, engaging a little bit more.

AR - That's very powerful, it had a really powerful impact. Do you remember what the context was in terms of discovering that book? Was it just something that you stumbled upon by yourself or was it part of your curriculum somewhere? How did you get your hands on it?

LG - It's amazing you asked that question because that thought just came into my mind. It wasn't part of any curriculum. We didn't have any Women's Studies classes in high school or anything like that. But I remember that I was - throughout my whole life, since I was in nursery school I have developed relationships with librarians. I remember the first librarian who was in my nursery school. I would talk to them. I loved to read since I was very little and they would pull out books that they thought I would like. Like in nursery school, the librarian would save all the "Amelia Bedelia" books. She would say, "A new Amelia Bedelia book came in!" and I would be very excited. So I developed a relationship with this librarian at my high school. She said to me one day {8:47}, "This book came in that you might be interested in." I remember the cover, it was the original cover. It was in the 90's. It was 1991 or 1992. It was in high school. I think the book had been out for a few years by then, but she was the one who recommended that I read the book. It was an awakening.

AR - You had a feminist awakening in high school around having read *The Beauty Myth* and so on. So, where did that take you? Where did you go next with your feminist consciousness being raised in some ways?

LG - First of all, I read everything in sight! I started reading through the feminist literature. But you know, it had to do with Naomi Wolf more. After I read that book I started looking her up on the internet. It was the early days of the internet too. I remember that just after that book, maybe a couple of years - I was in university, I was seventeen when I started university. And there was this chat on this website called "ivillage" which was an old - I don't even think it exists anymore. It was a women's blog and information site. There was this chat with Naomi Wolf and I was very, very excited about this. And I thought, "Wow. I can ask her my questions." And I logged on and we had this conversation, and right towards the end, she said something about starting this new institute called "The Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership" which is based on Victoria Woodhull. She was the first woman to run for president in the United States. And it was a series of retreats that they had in upstate New York. They had bought this house - The Woodhull Institute no longer exists unfortunately - it did for about fifteen years.

I was in one of the first classes to go through the program. I was in one of the first groups to participate in this. It was a really feminist leadership [retreat]. It was ahead of its time really. There are a lot of organizations that do that now, but back then, her idea was that if you could train women when they are very young to see themselves as potential leaders for the future, instill in them this sense of ethical leadership, we could change politics and media and so on. I was maybe eighteen or nineteen when I went. The amazing thing about that was that there were all of these other women who were very accomplished. Also people like Naomi Wolf, Robin

Stern, and Susan Cain were there, there was a whole group of women who were leading it. Also the women who were coming, mostly young women in their twenties from the States, were in all of these power positions: the media, some of them in politics, some of them in government. And it opened up this whole world for me that I hadn't known existed. I could see all of these potential paths that I couldn't see before, that I had no access to before - because I had no one to talk to about it, no one to encourage me or push me in that direction. And I think it changed the whole course of my life actually, really - that first retreat. It was very powerful.

AR - Can you tell me more about the paths that you saw opening up. What kinds of paths? What do you mean by that?

LG - Well, first of all I had just started university and I was clueless about university. No one in my family had gone to school. I was the first person to go to university. The only reason I went was because other people around me were going to the school that I was in. But I had no direction because I had no idea what was possible. In some ways I think that's a gift. I think there is something really wonderful about not having a set path. But the thing about seeing these other women, I saw what was possible. And they really encouraged ambition and speaking out and getting to the higher echelons in all of these places. So even things like writing for the media, which is something that I do a lot now was something that {13:15} started there.

It was this message that women's voices are not being heard. And if women's voices are not being heard then women's issues are not being taken seriously. So it was like a lot of different models of what was possible. The idea that I just had to figure out for myself was what I wanted and to go for it. And not only that I *could* but that I *should!* - that it was really important, that it was a responsibility that I had not only towards myself, but to other women as well. And I had no models like that at all. So when I started it was my first year of university, I started taking women's studies classes which were really eye opening. I think about this experience in my first women's studies class. It was the first year, and we were reading *Cat's Eye*, Margret Atwood's *Cat's Eye*. Oh no, *The Edible Woman*. We also read *Cat's Eye*, but *The Edible Woman*. And the TA [teaching assistant] who was very feminist would say to me - she was really trying to get me to unpack the feminist messages in *The Edible Woman*, about eating disorders and being consumed and culture and all that. And I was so clueless. I remember we would have these conversations and I did not know what she wanted from me.

AR - In some ways that's good, right? It forces you, right?

LG - I think that's it. I was really pushed. I was questioned in these classes, but I was also pushed by these other women [at Woodhull] - most of them were much older than I was, five or ten years older, and were sort of down the line. And were very ambitious, professional women.

AR - I want to come back to Woodhull because I know that you were active with that group for a long time. Almost until they closed, right? I want to get back to that.

LG - I'm still in touch with Naomi Wolf and with a lot of the women in that organization.

AR - Who are some of the women other than Naomi of whom you are still in touch from there?

LG - Robin Stern, who is a psychologist at Columbia. We worked together later on a project; Tara Bracco, who was also one of the first women who attended the retreats, she is a journalist in New York City and also someone who does a lot of social activist projects. She did a project, which she called "The Project Solution" which funds specific social activist projects around the world. Wendy Jagar-Hyman who was the executive director of education there for a while. Susan [Cain], she wrote this book *Quiet* about introverts. We keep in touch sometimes. Catherine Orenstein who is the director of the "Op-Ed" project.

AR - This is quite a network. It sounds like being able to develop this network is a really important part of feminist leadership too.

LG - That was one of the goals of Woodhull. They talked a lot in that first session about the old boy's network and saying we need to develop an "old girl's network" - it doesn't sound the same, but that was part of the networking. I just want to say something in here about class. One of the questions that you ask about class was one of the things that was amazing about this organization too - it was trying to bring people from all different backgrounds and cities and classes. I am an honorary member of the Wellesley Women's book club [here in Israel]. I am amazed, one of the things that I noticed in this group was exactly this network. Anytime anybody needs anything, women who are located all over the world help each other access what they need to access - whether it is a job, or a place to stay, {17:39}, or a connection, or whatever. And I think that that is so class based because as a working-class girl/woman [I came] from a background where I couldn't even know that Wellesley existed. It was so far off the radar. So something about coming into these very closed circles allows for access to those networks. And Woodhull tried to diversify those networks a little bit.

AR - Lets go back to your developmental trajectory a little bit. You are having all these experiences; you are taking women's studies courses. How does it play out in terms of your education and the way you were progressing? You went to York for your undergraduate and then your Masters. So tell me a little bit about how that kind of played out there?

LG - In terms of the educational choices that I made, I have to say first of all that it was very random. There was something very random about it because I was meandering. I was meandering because I had no sense or template in which to understand the decisions I was making about where to go to school and what programs to pick and so on. By some miracle it worked out incredibly well and I am very happy about the choices that I made, but it was a meandering path. And the feminism was also kind of meandering. I finished my undergraduate degree and I actually wasn't ready to leave school. I really liked it. I had no plan along the way that I was going to do a PhD or become an academic whatsoever. It was just: I was going to stay

in school and do what I loved until I don't love it anymore and then I'm going to find something else. So there was no long-term plan really.

And then I started doing my Masters at York in Interdisciplinary Studies, which was a great program for me because it allowed me to combine all of these different interests. It allowed me to combine all of these different interests: feminism, psychology, sociology and cobble together a project that I wanted to do. What I ended up doing was looking at women's experiences of depression. This was also a very fortuitous and happenstance project because I was hired as an undergraduate by Myriam Mongrain in our department in psychology to do the SCID, the Structured Clinical Interview [*for the DSM, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*], on this sample of people that she was doing a project on. I would do this study, I was just doing it for money – I was hired as a research assistant. And we get to the end of this thing, which was very structured. And I felt so dissatisfied. I felt like I didn't actually have an understanding of what happened. So we turn off the tape and I would say, "So tell me, what do you think that this was about? What was this experience of depression like for you? Why did this happen?" And then they would start telling these very interesting stories, mostly about relationships actually. So every time I would ask about depression, they would talk to me about relationships. And I found that interesting, especially for the women. How their emotional lives were so intertwined with their social surroundings with their partners, their parents, or their advisors. These were people who were in graduate school as well so most of them didn't have kids. And so then I decided, okay, I'd like to explore this a little bit more. So that's how I decided to do a Masters.

That project really was - I don't think I thought of it as a feminist project, but I think that underneath there was a deep interest in women's narratives, women's stories about why this happened to them. Why they think this happened to them. The amazing thing is that I would start and I would say, "Tell me about your depression" and they kept going back to relationships. I got really frustrated because in the beginning I thought, "No, no, no, tell me about *the* depression" as if the depression was this thing that was separate from everything that was going on around them. As I did this project and got deeper into it, I started to understand that these links again between the social world and the expectations {22:19}, the agendas and what was going on interpersonally for people. So that was the Masters.

When I finished that, I thought I really love it now even more, I'm still not done. So then I decided to do the PhD in the History and Theory program in psychology at York. And that was another really amazing program for me because it allowed for so much freedom. It allowed me to cull this critical thinking that I was developing whereas I thought in mainstream psychology, even in the other departments at York, there wouldn't be room for that. I wanted a place that would allow me for maximum intellectual freedom. And actually, Alex, you'll remember that my PhD, initially, was going to be on this project of feminist psychologists - that was the direction that I was going in. I was involved in this project. But then half-way through my PhD program

my mom died of cancer and my direction shifted simply because I was so immersed in my own grief. I felt it was very important to explore. I think I understood even at that time that that was very gendered. Even though at the time I didn't present it that way. Only now, many years later, I'm starting to understand and to unpack some of the stuff I did in my dissertation looking at gender bias. That's been very, very interesting and fruitful.

AR - I have a couple of questions about this. As you know, one of the things that we are really interested in in this project is how and where and in what ways your feminism has entered your work as a psychologist and as an academic. So I want to explore that with you more as we go along. But I am also quite intrigued by - during your masters' work, you decided to undertake a qualitative research project. And I want to know how that happened, given that typically, although maybe not in your case, there is very little training offered in qualitative methods - compared to quantitative methods. So how did that come about for you?

LG - With this project that I was in, in the undergrad, I was bored to death. I just thought, "This is not telling me anything about these people's experiences". So the motivation came because I had this deep curiosity. And I think this is also connected to the reading - as an avid reader from the time I was very young. My attraction to psychology, to qualitative methods, my attraction to reading, is this deep curiosity about what it's like to be this other person. What is the subjectivity of this other person? I was so curious I felt I had to find somebody who could teach me how to do this. And that is when I came to David Rennie, who died a few years ago, also another professor in our department who was well known for developing grounded theory methods in psychology in particular.

So I came to him and said, "Look I am really interested in this question, I really want to know what is going on here. Can you help me?" That is how it was. I knocked on his door one day and said, "I really want to know this. How can I develop this?" And he trained me. So I started - I took his qualitative methods courses. But even more so than taking his course, we would have these meetings where he would sit with me for hours. Now when I think as an early career faculty member, how much work there is and how many projects, administration, students and so on, it is hard for me to imagine myself sitting with a student for as many hours as David sat with me, and really went through things with me - line by line - really making sure that I understood it. He would have meetings at his house with all of the other graduate students. It was really thanks to him that I learned to do grounded theory qualitative methods, but it was really driven by curiosity.

It wasn't so much that I was seeking qualitative methods. It was that I was seeking to answer a question and the tools that I was trained in didn't give me the answer to the question that I {21:51} was curious about. So I had to find other ways of knowing - through speaking to people, connecting, I thought, "David - this is somebody I can go and talk to and see what happens" - which has always been my approach. When I like someone's work or like something I have read,

especially today, I'll just go and email them, anyone in the world and just say, "This is an amazing paper. I'm really interested in talking more to you about x, y, and z." Most of the time people are very generous and willing to talk because they're intellectuals and they are curious and they want to have that engagement. Sometimes they just don't answer or say, "No, I'm too busy". Most of the time people are very open and I learned that very early on. This is connected to the class thing again: because I didn't know that that is frowned upon in academia where you are supposed to follow more formal rules. There are a lot of things I didn't know about the way you are supposed to speak and how you are supposed to approach people and that there is this hierarchy and you shouldn't be going up to the superstars in the field and be saying, "Hey. Talk to me! I want to talk to you!" I really didn't know and so I didn't know that I was transgressing the informal rules in academia. And that really served me well.

Today I feel I am a little bit more trained. I have been socialized as an academic. I have gone up a class in some ways too. I approach people in a different way. Something about that freedom and the programs that I was in that gave me so much freedom to really explore. I took courses in graduate school, this is the History and Theory program allows you to do this - I took courses in feminist epistemology and medical anthropology, all kinds of feminist anthropology courses too. It was just an amazing feast of theories and ideas and projects and studies and looking at things from different ways. It was just so amazing. Graduate school is amazing in some ways, I miss it.

AR - You mentioned earlier that when you look back on your dissertation, you can understand part of the process. Your mom had died and there was an incredible personal process around that, but you were also surrounded by all this feminist stuff in your classes and so on. How did that all eventually come together? Not to say that it necessarily has in any kind of direct, obvious, linear way, but can you talk a little bit more about how that feminist journey and your research and your psychology journey came together?

LG - Yeah, for sure. It did come together in a direct way, but only recently. I finished my PhD in 2009. My dissertation looked, as you know, at the history of the psychological construct of grief. And really what drew me to that topic was because I was being trained in our program, the History and Theory program, to think critically about emotions and social norms and why we think the way that we do - looking at it historically, theoretically and critically. I started noticing this very big gap between what I was experiencing as a griever and what society - messages that I was getting about getting back to work, getting over the grief and so on. Because I had this training, this critical thinking training, I could actually take one step back and say, "Okay, this is really curious. My mom just died and yet the message I'm getting is that I need to get back to work, I need to be productive, I need to go back to things, I need to distract myself." And that I was taking too long with my grief. And so I had a very deep personal experience and also this critical thought. And so these two things came together for me in the dissertation. {31:32}

So it was very critical - it looks at the pathologization of grief; it looks at what that means to be a modern griever today; how that has made up the definition of grief and how that later became a very hot topic with the DSM-V and so it was critical, it was very deep. It was a deep process. But I didn't understand the gendered components even though I had some clues to it, I didn't understand it entirely because I was focused on something else at the time. Now in retrospect, I understand two things. First, that the depth of my grief and the way that I was expressing it was also related to my role in my family. The closeness between me and my mom, the caretaking role I had towards my mom that I don't see in my brothers or my dad. They really miss her, they think about her and grieve her in a different way, but there was something gendered about the onus of responsibility and the closeness and intensity of that bond that was particular to being female. And also the expression of grief - being the one who holds the grief for the family, who does the memorials, who reminds my family members about her and holding her memory - became my job in the family.

I moved to Israel and I started noticing that grief was a very, very gendered phenomenon here. And part of my recent thinking about grief is related to the political uses of grief. One of the first things I noticed when I got here is that mothers' grief as the expressers of grief, who hold the collective grief for the society was used very actively - is used very actively - very consciously by politicians, by the government, in order to further justify war, the army, militarism, all of that. But when I really saw in all of these rituals and traditions was how the women's role was to be the holders of this collective grief and at the same time they are also pathologized for it. The types of grievers that are pathologized are the ones that are overly expressive of their grief, that are taking too long with their grieving process, that are too intense in their grief, that are not willing to go back to things as they were before. So women are caught up in this double bind. I didn't understand it at the time even though I was experiencing it personally. I didn't understand it the way I do today, this dual expectation that they both be the expressers and the holders of grief for the family, for the society, for the culture, for the nation, and so on. But, not too much. When it is time to put it away, then it is time to put it away. There is this bind that is very hard to get out of, that you are both required to be this expresser and also required to keep it in check. If you can't keep it in check, then you are given an anti-depressant.

AR - So you are allowed to grieve, but on our terms and to serve our purposes, our meaning, the nation, the society and so on.

LG - I don't think it is just that you are allowed, but you are required, you are required to do that. At least in the Israeli context, but also, I think in North America. Women are required to grieve because if you don't show grief there is something wrong with you. In the Israeli context, if you don't show grief then it's almost like you are not a good citizen. There is something - the Israeli context is very different than the North American context. Here the culture is very militarized. In order to give meaning to such tremendous losses, there needs to be this link between the sacrifice and the loss and further defending nations. However you want to frame it. And women are the

ones who are on television crying, especially the mothers. The mothers are the one. The men are the warriors, they go off to war and women are the grieverers, they stay home and they hold the collective grief, but the collective grief is also bounded and can't go past what is deemed acceptable. You are damned if you do and damned if you don't. {36:36} And I see that much more clearly today than I did then. I have been writing about that more recently.

AR - Especially given your change in cultural and national contexts too. It has really brought it into huge relief.

LG - It has become very sharp here. It is very hard to - but I have a little bit of ambivalence about what I am saying as well because if you look at the American context where you look at soldiers coming back from war who are traumatized there is something hidden about it; whereas here, there is something very visible about it. So there are pros and cons to both. There is also making space for public grief, which is not something you see in other nations. It is complicated.

AR - Usually these things are. Tell me, I want to go back to your evolution as a health psychologist. When I look at your CV now and the research that you are doing, even at the time you were doing the depression and the grief work and so on you were veering towards that kind of community of scholars that I may characterize as critical health psychologists. So again, can you talk about how that development occurred and your identification with that kind of community.

LG - That was also pretty happen stance. Yes and no. Again, all my work is pretty much driven by a personal curiosity. And that personal curiosity could either happen because of something that happened to me or something that happened around me. I am very engaged in the world that I live in and I'm very attuned also to what is going on for me in my development. So at the time when I was in graduate school when I started down this path with the grief, I was also very curious about how people with cancer cope and how their families cope. And so I switched my part-time job. At that time was working in this depression lab to start working with Professor Karen Fergus, who is now also in the department of psychology [at York] but at the time was not. She was doing a project on women with breast cancer and their spouses and she needed somebody who had experience with qualitative research to work on this project part-time. We were looking at how women make decisions when seeking care when they first find an ambiguous breast lump. And because I just had this experience where my mom had just died, I had a curiosity about the psychological processes around cancer, I applied for this job.

I remember sitting with Karen and she said, "Your mom just died a year ago and I want to make sure that you are prepared for doing these interviews and hearing these stories." But I remember at the time that she said to me, "I also got into the field of psycho-oncology a year after my father died. And in some ways it makes you a more sensitive researcher and it makes you a more engaged or passionate researcher because you have this personal experience to draw on. At the same time we'll also need to be cautious that you are not projecting too much of your own stuff

into that." Ultimately, that was a great conversation and she hired me and we started working on this project. And that was - it opened up a whole field that I was very interested in. How do people with cancer - in a way I was trying to make sense of all of my childhood experiences.

My mom was diagnosed with cancer when I was nine years old. I was very, very young. My little brother was just four weeks old when she was first diagnosed, she was 34 years old, she was a year younger than I am now, which I find very hard to get my head around, with three kids. And it was a recurrent. She had metastatic breast cancer for eighteen years until she died from it. So there were a lot of surgeries and there were a lot of treatments, infections, and so on. And I was just experiencing all of that. {41:09} There was so much survival. There were medications and caregiving and looking after my little brother. There was a lot going on. A couple of years after she died, part of the process was trying to understand what had happened. How do I understand this psychologically? How do I get a frame around what had happened? So I think that's what really drew me to the field. And that project led to another project and another project and so I became interested in this whole field of psycho-oncology, which really does look at professional and personal caregivers.

I just want to say in terms of feminism and psychology, sometimes it is very obvious when those things intersect. And other times it is less obvious but I always say this to my students and when I give seminars on methods and things like this is that I am a feminist, and so everything I do is feminist. In other words, the view that I have on the world and the way that I speak to my students and the way that I write up my projects and the topics that I choose to focus on are all feminist in orientation. Sometimes the finished product doesn't necessarily look feminist in the way that we might see in a women's studies journal. But that is a very strategic decision. So - in a project looking at women's decision whether to see a doctor I may choose to write two articles out of that data. So, one article might look at a clean theory looking at the precision of decision making and findings about how women make decisions, the role of the partner and so on. And then I'll publish that in a journal where I know that my target audience is going to read it. So that means that if I want oncologists to read that and treat women in a better way when they come into see them, I need to talk to these oncologists in a way that they can hear. If I come in with an article that I would publish in *Feminism & Psychology* to the *Journal of Psycho-Oncology*, a) it isn't going to get published; b) even if it did get published nobody would be able to understand it because they have no frame of reference in which to understand that. So if my goal is to improve care for women, I need to speak in a way that the oncologists can hear.

But then, I'll also say, but now I want to unpack this theoretically a little bit. I want to bring in feminist theory. So then I'll take that same data and rewrite it for *Social Science and Medicine* where I will do a discourse analysis and I'll talk about what these competing messages or discourses are that the women are navigating that are very, very gendered when they are making decisions about seeking care. And how do we understand this a little bit more critically when looking at power relations, class differences, and so on? So I always try to write it in both ways

and speak two languages because the goal at the end of the day is to communicate so people can hear you. In order to improve women's lives and the lives of our participants, we need to speak clearly first of all and in ways that people can hear. It is strategic, they are both feminist. But you wouldn't be able to look at that article in one of these onco-journals and be able to say, "Oh yes, this is a feminist researcher." You wouldn't be able to see it from looking at the text but the message that is coming through is very feminist. It is about empowering women, it is about improving their care, it is about increasing the compassion of doctors towards women.

AR - The whole role of it is very feminist. I'm smiling because I am recalling something you said earlier in the interview, which was when your mother told you that sometimes you need to go around, you don't just go right up and confront. And it sounds like in some ways you have taken her advice, right? {45:25}

LG - Yes, exactly. In some ways, it was very, very good advice. {45:27} Even though it was a different context she was onto something about how to communicate in ways that are the most efficient for getting what you want. And in terms of the health work, it has been really important to me.

AR - I am going to go to our protocol now because I want to make sure that I have you reflect on some of these questions. One of the things that we ask about, you have already talked a little bit about, is some of the experiences that you have had based on class, potentially based on gender, ethnicity, I wonder if you have ever felt like you have had a struggle or a challenge being a woman, being a feminist, having a background of a certain socioeconomic status. Have you ever felt any discrimination based on, even the fact that you are Jewish, for example? You occupy a bunch of social locations. Experiences of discriminations, challenges based on any of those?

LG – Lots - different places and different stages. I'll start first in graduate school. I think the class issue is a big one. Class and gender do intersect here. It is probably a cultural difference too, maybe Israeli - even though I was born and raised in Canada, I have Israeli parents and grew up in an Israeli community. And the way of speaking is much more direct and much more to the point and people are - it's sort of like there is no bullshit. Cut to the point. And that is *not* the way to speak in academia!! And partly that is class based too, I think. I think in the beginning when I started out, there is the manner of the way that I communicated, which was a little bit more eccentric and very outspoken and direct, and I didn't couch my critique in academic terms, which I later learned how to do a little bit better. I think that people thought that I wasn't intelligent because of that. And partly I think that has to do with being a woman too. And another piece of this is how I looked. So I think my dress was very eccentric when I started. I liked to wear pink sparkly things, and lots of jewelry. I think that that also came across as being kind of an "air head" or something like this. I sort of got that feeling sometimes. I know that I'm intelligent and that I have important things to say. It wasn't that I ever felt that that there was any truth to that. I never had that thing about the imposter syndrome, but I could see something about

the way that I looked and the way that I presented myself didn't align with what an academic is supposed to look like and sound like. So I did experience some discrimination in that sense.

Later down the line, in Israel especially, which is a very patriarchal society, one of the things that I noticed almost immediately when I came was that here was a lot of pressure for women to have children. It is a very family oriented society. And a lot of my interactions with people even in academia, it doesn't matter how accomplished I am, it doesn't matter that I have lots of publications and grants and so on. The kind of thing that people want to know is when I am going to get married and have kids. That is very explicit. People in my department, in my university, want to set me up. There is a lot interest in my personal life. That I am still single is a real liability. I don't think that men experience that in quite the same way. The little things are the big things.

We have a university newsletter that comes out once a month. There was a special issue where they were highlighting the contributions of women. You also have to understand the Israeli context, women make up more, like everywhere else in the world, make up more of the graduate student population. But as you go along the line, the number of full professors, assistant professors {50:11}, associate professors is very small. So there is a problem with the promotion of women. So part of this newsletter thing was to highlight the work that women were doing. And somebody said [to a colleague of mine], "Oh you know it is too bad that they didn't photograph you in your bikini." But that is common - those kinds of remarks, those sexist remarks and comments are daily. It is more acceptable here than in the North American context. That discrimination or the microaggressions, if you looked at the racial critique literature they talk about microaggressions. I think it's those things that translate into who gets what and how many. I am a negotiator. I know how I need to negotiate. I was taught this at Woodhull. I come in asking for all the things I want to ask for and I realize that it doesn't matter that I have all these skills to get what I want. Because I am a woman I may not get the things that I am asking for. Part of being Jewish, I never experienced any sense of anti-Semitism, York University is a fairly - lots of Jewish professors and Jewish students - but of course as I moved to Israel and in recent years there has been a lot of cultural boycotts of Israeli academics, which I am very against. It is sort of defeats the purpose of what academics are able to accomplish and do. I think it is counterintuitive and counterproductive in terms of moving the agenda of peace forward. But I know that my papers aren't getting accepted because my affiliation now is an Israeli affiliation. The discrimination is more about Israel than it is about being Jewish, but sometimes with those things it is difficult to know where that line is.

AR - Absolutely. Maybe we could turn to something a little bit more positive. What about mentors? Who have been your mentors and how have they affected you?

LG - I have lots of mentors. I want to say something about mentors first of all. I've thought a lot about mentors. I've talked to women about mentors that they have had. I think this is complicated

for us. [My friend Maria Vamvalis, a brilliant educator, talks often about the fact that] women haven't held power for a very long time. And these mentoring relationships are sort of hierarchical, but collaborative also. They are ambiguous and it is hard to figure out the dynamics all the time because they are historically recent. All of this is very new. I think that we are still figuring it out. Mentoring relationships are often presented as this very ideal kind of thing – it's very important for you to find a mentor. But when you are in them, they are also very complicated, emotionally, psychologically even professionally they can be complicated. I think that we are still figuring this out but I think they are very important relationships.

First I would say, I don't know if you can call your mom a mentor, professionally, but I think that while my mom didn't go to school and really had no tools to understand what it was that I was doing. She was very, very proud of me, but she didn't understand what I was doing in school, what it meant to have an MA or PhD, she just sort of wasn't interested really. She just didn't get it. Something about it that just wasn't in her frame of reference. But the one thing that she gave me from the time I was very young and all the way to the time I was going to school was this unwavering sense of self-worth. Everything good in my life comes from that sense of self-worth and everything I have been able to accomplish professionally comes from that sense of self-worth. So when I was getting these messages around that I wasn't good enough or smart enough or - there are a lot failures involved in academia. On a daily basis there are - we don't get grants, papers are not accepted, the promotion process is torturous, students give you bad evaluations sometimes. There is a lot of stuff that goes on in academia where you need to constantly say "Okay, I didn't do it this time, but I am going to do it next time." {55:00} That sense of unwavering self-worth, that sense that your value as a person, as an academic, thinker, doesn't come from anything that anyone can judge you for from the outside, came from my mom. I think because of that, I was able to finish graduate school I had the hutzpah to seek out the post-docs to seek out jobs in academia, even though along the way, because of the things I was doing along the way were so not, they sort of had no application. When I look back I think I was doing qualitative methods, I was in these weird programs, History and Theory of Psychology. I was studying these completely random topics that nobody else was looking at. It is kind of a miracle that I got a job. It is miracle that the career worked out. But that came from my mom. She always taught me to believe in myself, that worth was there, that I should just keep doing what I knew was true, was right for me. So that's it.

But in terms of mentors, Naomi Wolf was a mentor and I have stayed in touch with her for a very long time even to this day. Alex, you were a very important mentor in my graduate school and actually my whole career is based on the grief and loss stuff and is thanks to you. When I was going in the direction of the feminist psychology, I remember that we had this conversation about my interest in the grief stuff. I was ready to say that I am ready to stick to the course, but that conversation that we had about staying true to that and exploring that really changed my career. I mean actually it is the thing that I am most well known for. We didn't actually talk about the project of oncologists; the work that I am doing is because of that very seminal conversation.

Michelle Fine was an important mentor for me. I went there [CUNY] while I was doing my post-doc. We did a project together. It was a think tank on grief and loss. And from her I really learned about how to incorporate the social justice agendas into the projects and just to think really critically about things. One of the things that I learned from Michelle was how to ask different kinds of questions. Different questions than what we were asking in History and Theory. They are both very critical sets of questions, but they are coming at it from a very different view point. And her excellence: I think there is something about her productivity, the way she speaks, the way - I want to say "charisma" but it isn't even the word - the way she draws an audience when she speaks in a way that is very compelling and interesting and teaching people about things that they may not even think that they are even interested in was appealing to me, is appealing to me. It is a model that I want to aspire to in my academic career, that sense of excellence.

Friends, obviously - I don't know if you think of friends as mentors - but I have a network of really good female friends around the world, especially in Toronto, who every time that I am feeling down, there is failure, or something going on at work, or something in my personal life that I can just skype or call. They mirror back that thing that my mom was able to do for me – just to say, “You are okay, keep going, this is terrible, I'm going to cry with you”, but they push me forward. I have had a lot of difficult things, there have been a lot of losses in my life. Not just my mom, my aunt, a lot of friends. It has been hard. I had to work part-time all through graduate school in order to pay for my living and my school. The struggle was hard. You need those women around you to say, “Keep going, you are doing well, keep going”. All of them I consider mentors.

AR - Let me flip the question. Now you are in a position to be a mentor. So can you tell me about what being a mentor means to you. {59:35}

LG - Yes. The first time I sort of got it - I have a lot of students now, a lot of them are medical students, female medical students. Some of them are masters, PhD, I teach a feminist women's health seminar. Feminism is not well developed in Israel, at least in the women that I am coming across. It is not like in North America. Also the academic system works differently here. Where in North America we do a four year undergraduate general arts degree, we are usually exposed to a lot of different ideas and classes, in Israel right from the get go, you choose your major and you stick to it. And so if you do anything other than women's studies or maybe sociology, maybe, I'm not even sure if that's true, you are not going to get any exposure to feminism. So most of the women who are in my classes, or most of the women that I am mentoring, don't even know what feminism is. They have never had any exposure, they don't know who the feminist thinkers are, they don't even know about things like pay inequity. It's just basic things that they are being awakened to in these classes that focus on women's health, but are being taught from a feminist perspective.

I remember the first time I was in the car with one of my students, we were going back from some conference or something and she was talking about planning her future - a medical student. And she was making these decisions of whether she should or shouldn't do a PhD based on her partner who is was a physician and what he wanted. I was so, "This is the rest of your life. We are talking about a small period of time and you are making decisions based on a couple of years, but this is going to affect your entire life." Through that conversation she changed her decision about to what she was going to do in terms of her own education - she was going to go for the PhD and continue. I realized, after I had that conversation, the power of the mentor. It's not like I didn't know this, because my mentors were so important to me in shaping my life tremendously. I am very, very grateful for the mentorship I got because it shaped my whole life. I wouldn't be able to do any of this if I didn't have these possibilities, these models who said "You can do it." But I didn't realize that I could also do that for other women until I had that moment and thought about how much of a responsibility it is. Because you have to be so careful about what you say and how you say it and really think. I don't think I really understood the gravity of that until that moment. And sort of looking back and thinking about the conversations I had with my students and giving them advice about what I thought was right, but you know sort of understanding that that is a really important role and you have to really think consciously about it.

This thing I said about the dynamics in the beginning, I think a lot about my own mentor relationships about what I wanted to bring forward with my students, just being conscious about all of that. Being conscious about your triggers, conscious of when you are giving advice that you think is right [for you] vs. what is right for your students - how far to push students. So in this feminist seminar on women's health, I'm bringing together a group of women from lots of different places: social work, doctors, biochemists, people in gerontology, sociology. They are all coming together and we are having conversations about sexuality, heart disease, cancer, violence against women. And the conversations are very heated. But for them, this is the first time they are coming to understand the power of the society around them in shaping their day to day lives. And the decision about how far to push is one that needs to be taken very seriously and thoughtfully because if you push too much, you risk them shutting down completely and sometimes there is a lot of anger directed at me for being the messenger. { 1:04 } I am not the one who is responsible for this state of inequity. I want you to be conscious. There is kind of an anger about that because it is hard to look at. It is a balancing act. It is trying to figure out what is the optimal to push and hope that then they'll have a curiosity that they'll want to explore it more or pass it onto their kids, to the people around them.

AR - Interesting. I want to ask you a bit of a meta-question now. Your training and expertise is very interdisciplinary, but I think I could say accurately that you do have an identification as a psychologist.

LG – Yes.

AR - And you know the field, so I wanted to hear your reflections about the state of the field of feminist psychology. What do you see as the major accomplishments of the field? Where would you like to see it going?

LG - I think feminist psychology has been extremely important in bringing to light issues facing women specifically. I can only speak from the health field, mental and physical health field, which is mostly where my research is. It has done a really great job in bringing to consciousness even the things I teach in class: inequities in access to services, or the types of medications that we give to men vs. women and where the studies are being done, a lot of the methodology and so on. But in terms of the field of feminist psychology itself, I sometimes feel like it is raising issues about women's issues that are related to women like reproduction and health issues that women are facing. But it is not necessarily feminist and that is frustrating for me. It is really, really frustrating. So I will sometimes look at things like, so let's say sometimes you look at something like *Psychology of Women Quarterly (PWQ)* to *Gender and Society* as two journals that I like to look at. There is no comparison in terms of the feminist critical, theoretical, interdisciplinary understanding of issues that affect women's bodies in *Gender and Society* versus *PWQ*, which is a really great journal and talks a lot about women's issues, but doesn't necessarily break it down in the same way that I would like, the complexity of what can be done in *Gender and Society* versus what is done in *Psychology of Women Quarterly*. I think there have been a lot of inroads. Things that we are looking at now are things that we didn't look at forty years ago, but there still remains some work in terms of really unpacking, taking a feminist look and really unpacking the complexities around some of these issues.

AR - What do you think are some of the barriers to doing that within psychology?

LG - First of all, methodology is still a big issue. I think there is still this emphasis on being scientific and objective - even though feminist psychologists, feminism, critical thinking knows there is no such thing. We know there is no such thing as complete objectivity in science and that statistics hide a lot of things. There is still kind of an attempt to stay within that paradigm and if you stay within that paradigm there are a lot of things that you can't publish.

I'll give you an example - I often feel that my best work is the work that I had the hardest time publishing. So it is very interesting. Some of the papers that are cut and dry - even qualitative methods - that are presenting findings, for example the paper looking at the grief in oncologists, I have no difficulty publishing that work. And it is interesting work and important work. But the far more complicated, messy {1:08} work - like looking at this new paper that I have under review now - is looking at how militarism in Israel affects women's health in every sphere - physical health, mental health, civic health, politics. How many women are there in politics? How much are women being paid? Education resources, all of this stuff, which is extremely complex, it is an interaction of a lot of different things including racism and class and sexism and so on. It is really hard to publish that paper even in feminist, purportedly feminist journals,

because the complexity of it is not aligned with the scientific template which wants things to be broken down into very, very clear and cleaned up variables. Real feminist work is throwing in all these variables - these variables are important, the intersection of these variables is important - so there is a real frustration with trying to get the more complex stuff that is more based in reality, even in the feminist journals, published.

AR - Just taking it back now to your career and this is a related question actually, to what you were just saying - looking at your career thus far, what do you think of as your most significant accomplishment or the thing that you are most pleased with or proud of that you have done?

LG - There are a couple of things that I am happy with. I hope that there is going to be a lot more significant stuff to come because I am just at the start. I think the work that I did for my dissertation that broke down the reasons we pathologize the way that we grieve was important, really important. It was ahead of the curve in a way. As I said earlier, many years down the line, two or three years down the line, there were these changes happening in the DSM - which happened. They did happen. But, there was a conversation in the media about what it means to pathologize a normal human experience like grief. And, I'm happy with that work. I think that was really good work and I'm happy with the fact that I was going to write a book out of that dissertation and for lots of different reasons it didn't happen, but what I did instead was publish a lot in the media about why this was a problem and why pathologizing grief was changing the experience of what it means to be a mourner. This idea, I mean it is a very simple message at the end of it: The public message - the dissertation wasn't simple at all - but the message out of it was that grief is a normal experience and that in order to feel the full range of being a human being is that we need to make space for this grief and that this was okay. Grieving is okay. To give that message to the public was very important to me.

Related to that, the work that I did looking at the grief of oncologists over patient death is a project that was the first empirical project that looked at this topic. And, what I'm trying to do is, in the bigger picture, is to give people a better death. I know it sounds like a very dramatic statement, but I noticed - because of my own experience with my mom and the oncologists in her life - that the relationships in medicine were starting to be eroded and progressively so as the Canadian health care system has become more corporatized, the business models. Even though it is a socialized healthcare system, {1:13} still the model that is coming in recent years is much more corporatized. The relationships are being erased. So part of looking at grief in oncologists over patient death is saying these relationships are real relationships and they are important. And they are important not just for the well-being of the oncologist, which is also a very important message, I think, but also important to the quality of care that people are getting and the quality of death that they are experiencing.

And so being able to be very innovative in that project, now taking it worldwide, I'm doing a quantitative survey and trying to collect broad statistics of how frequent this is and what would

help oncologists is also being able to educate the public about this again. I wrote an op-ed about it in the *New York Times*. I was very proud of that. That it was published. I have it up on the wall. I feel really proud about that. I guess what I'm saying is the thing that makes me - I'm giving you examples and I think the thing that I'm proud of is being able to translate my research so that it is useful for the public. So that it's not just about a publication game, it's not just about me and my career, which I think happens sometimes in academia. You lose sight of the fact that the research you are doing is not about you and your promotion, right? We are encouraged to think about it in that way. Maybe the academic model teaches us to play the academic game and the goal is to earn as much as possible and publish as much as possible. But that is not the purpose. That is not why we are doing our work. So being able to constantly do this with every project, is to somehow take what I have learned and translate it for the public or translate it for oncologists doing medical education, changing pedagogy, giving Grand Rounds, giving workshops on the topic, policy changes - we did some work in Canada in terms of funding for single parents whose children had cancer and so on. So the kind of integration of the research with the public has been really important to me - I'm very, very proud of that.

I like the think tank that we did. I had a CIHR [*Canadian Institutes of Health Research*] grant to create a think tank on grief and loss. And we did four days - two at York University and two days at the Graduate Center at the University of New York. Those days were really powerful because they were an integration of researchers, clinicians, community organizations, grievors, just grievors from the public, health care professionals. They all came together on these very interdisciplinary days. The talks were very broad, lots of different formats. There was something so human and passionate and exciting and just relational about these meetings that you don't often see in academic conferences. Sometimes it feels like it is too intellectual, or too dry, it's too much in the head. And something about these conferences was a real integration. They were integrated. And because they were integrated, they had a profound impact on me, on the people who organized these conferences, but especially on the participants. We had probably around seventy participants come to each day so all in all it's quite a lot of people that were affected by it. I quite liked that project. I moved to Israel right afterwards, I couldn't continue the trajectory, but I think it is the ideal model for academia. We need the integration of all these players together in order to really understand something holistically and to understand the depth. It means it is more complicated and difficult to get your head around but it's also more real and more alive. {1:18}

Last point I'll say, the work I've done lately here, in Israel, has also been work that I really like. So this paper that I spoke about, the political uses of grief ["Mourning Sickness"] was sort of an integration of everything that I knew about grief brought to life with some very concrete examples of what happened here on the ground in Israel, but also I made these comparisons between what happens in the United States, what happens in Israel, in terms of how grief - especially mother's grief - is used in order to really push an agenda of war forward. And what I like about that paper is that it is integrated and interdisciplinary. But I also really like, and I think

it is really important for academics to be engaged in their worlds, to really know what is happening around you and to integrate that into your work. I think even this new paper on militarism is also aligned with that direction. They are very theoretical papers, but they are also very alive in the way we could say some empirical work is also alive.

AR - And very responsive to your local context, yeah. Two more questions for you. The first is, any advice to feminist women coming into academia, coming into psychology? I think implicit in a lot of what you said there is a lot of advice, but any you just want to put out there?

LG - Yes! Two things. First of all, I think one of the things that has really helped me as a new faculty member is that right away, I started looking for the like-minded people. So when I got here, the first thing I did was have a million meetings with as many people as I could. Lots of men, women, anybody who seemed vaguely interesting or related to my work, I invited them for a coffee. We had a coffee and we talked. Through this process I was able to put together a group of women, mostly, at my university, but also in the country who were around the same stage of career that I am and who are feminists as well. So what that means is that when I have an idea that I'm working on, on this militarism paper, I'm an outsider here. I'm Canadian. So there are a lot of blind spots. It is a benefit in the sense of being able to have a critical view because it isn't the air that I breathe; it's just that I'm new to it. But there are also blind spots. So I can bring these ideas to them - whatever the topic is - and say, "So tell me what you think about this and how can I develop this?" It is people to think with, but even more, it is people to kvetch with, you know? To be able to say, "This guy just said 'x, y, and z'; can you believe that"; or "What do you think about this student who has approached me to do this?" You know, any kind of problem that I've had that are related to gender or not related to gender, but all related to career. The group of women who are smart, who are feminist, who are critical - someone to talk to about the issues that they are facing. So I think finding a community of really supportive, like minded women is mandatory; really important and really hard to do. As I said, I had to meet a lot of people before I was able to form a very small group of people that I felt I could trust; that I could talk to. They are very, very important to my success, I think.

The other thing is just listening to your heart. I know that sounds corny to say, but I think I said earlier, I sort of did that because I didn't know you weren't supposed to do that. But at the end of the day, it really served me well because it means that anything that I do, I do because I really want to do it and because I'm really interested to do it. Not because I think that this is the thing that is going to get published, or I think this is the grant that is going to bring me money, or I think this is the career path that is going to get me the job. So I think that it is really important to follow your passions and to stay really true to, to stick to, the things that are going to lift you up, the things that engage you and interest you. The other way to do it, and I've seen a lot of my colleagues do this, is to go with what they think is trendy, whether that's a topic or a career trajectory, rather than thinking feminist psychology, let's say thinking social psychology, because there are more jobs in social psychology. {1:23} But then you spend your whole life

doing things that you are kind of "blah" about. And so what's the point of that? It's really important to stay true to your passion and it will work out or it won't work out, it's a risk.

AR - The potential long-term payoff is quite large if you stick to your guns. One last question, is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to contribute to this interview? Keeping in mind that this is perhaps first of several, is there anything that I haven't asked about that you would like to say?

LG - Let me think for a second. I think one of the questions that we ask in these interviews is how to balance your life with your career. I don't have kids yet and I'm single and so it makes it much easier to answer this question. I manage my own time as my own time and have a lot of freedom and it is easy to focus on the work. There aren't a lot of other responsibilities on the outside that other women at my career stage have. So it is easier for me to answer this question, but I think that even still, the work ethic is such, the expectation in academia is that we are working all the time. The message you are getting from the institution and the colleagues around you is that you are never enough. You always need more publications, more grants, more students, and more classes. And I don't think that that is a good way to live or a good way to be. I don't think it's a good way to be an intellectual thinker.

One of things that has been important for me in terms of work/-life balance is not just that I work less or that I stop working at a certain hour, but I don't stop doing things that are really important to me, like reading novels, that enrich my view of the world, or engage in social activism groups. I research grief but I also join the Palestinian-Israeli bereaved parents circle. So that I go and listen to people and I join this community and listen to people talk about their experiences as it relates to politics or as it relates to whatever. So, I just feel like these things need to be really integrated. To be a whole human being and to be a really good thinker, you need to get away from the computer. The goal should not be to produce as much as possible. The goal needs to be to produce the most innovative, the most thought provoking, the most inspiring, the most engaged kind of work that you can produce. And that is totally contra to the messages that we get. So it is a battle, it is a real battle to make the decision between: "Am I going to finish this paper now or am I going to sit on a bench with my novel or attend a meeting on an evening"? And if I just went by the message that I'm getting I'd just be at my desk all the time. But I would be a terrible academic. I really think that the work/-life balance is very important in developing yourself as a thinker. Our job is to develop ourselves as human beings in order to produce good work. It's not we produce good work so that we can be human beings on the weekend. So I think we got that a little messed up.

AR - Great! Well thank you so much. It has been a great hour and a half or so. There is still so much to talk about, but I think this is a good beginning.

LG - Thank you!