Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Lila Ghent Braine

Interviewed by Laura Ball, Alexandra Rutherford, and Axelle Karera
Newport, RI
March 14th, 2009

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LGB: Lila Ghent Braine, Interview participant
LB: Laura Ball, Interviewer
AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer
AK: Axelle Karera, Interviewer

LB: The first thing I need to get you to do is state your name, your date of birth, and your place of birth for the historical record

LGB: Lila Gent Braine, I've put in the Gent because I have written under that. I was born in Montreal, Quebec, Canada, on January 11th, 1926.

LB: I'm going to start off the interview with the question that we ask everybody at the start. Tell me about the emergence and development of your feminist identity.

LGB: In three sentences right?

LB : You can take as long as you want.

LGB: I think that as a child I was a feminist, although obviously I didn't know and I certainly didn't think that way. I felt that my mother's life seemed to me was difficult, in part ,because she was a woman. That is, my parents, although they came separately, were immigrants from Romania. My mother, who I think was very interested in school and received a scholarship to go to high school, didn't go to high school, because her family decided that they needed her at home to help with the younger children. I think that was very hard on my mother. The other thing is that my mother and father didn't get along very well, at least at some point, and I felt that my mother had no alternatives, that is, that she wasn't in a position to get any money, to get a job, and support herself. It's hard for me to say when I had these thoughts; I thought this way when I was 10, 11, 12 years old. These were actually some things that preoccupied me. I guess because I was identified with my mother and I was a good student academically, and I felt that it must have been hard on my mother not to be able to go to school when she wanted to. I personally think that was the beginning of my feminist identity, although I hardly would have described it that way at the time. Then obviously I went to school, I had an early marriage – that's where the Ghent comes from – then a divorce, no children in that marriage, children in the second marriage. I was certainly determined to make some sort of independent life for myself. I didn't want to put myself in my mother's position. It's not that I really sat and thought about it, I didn't, but there were things I wanted to do.

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I liked scholarly work, so to speak, and I was in a sense fortunate to be able to go to graduate school and all that sort of thing, and I really enjoyed what I did. Then along came the women's movement. I can't think of some individual thing that I read or that was happening, but clearly women were writing things and doing things that hadn't happened before and that I felt very sympathetic with and responsive to and excited by, so that was all really terrific. It changed the way we ran the house actually. One child was born in 1961 and one in 1964. My husband, who was also a psychologist – well he was really a psycholinguist, but he was a psychologist, but that was his interest. He was a very fair person and I knew I could count on that, but on the other hand, he wasn't the least bit interested in some of the demands that I was making on how we ran the house, such as who made dinner, or who cleaned up, or who did whatever there was to be done in the house. Of course we finessed many of these problems by hiring household help. On the other hand we did make some changes. We agreed to have equal dinner making. My husband is able to cook, he liked to cook when it was convenient for him to cook, and I said "tough, you have to eat every day," so it was an adjustment. We worked out, with some trial and tribulation, some of these things, including getting the house cleaned. It's true we hired someone who came in one day week. I don't really know if you want this kind of detail, do you?

LB: Anything that you want to give.

LGB: We were living in Santa Barbara at the time, and I remember that we had agreements about who was going to clean up or how we were going to trade off, and Marty said, "well, you know I don't care, I don't want to do this," and so I said, "I don't want to do it either." At any rate, we had a little period of about a year or 18 months when the house was really rather messy, but it couldn't get too messy because somebody came in once a week and cleaned up. We didn't have someone more than that partly because of money, mostly financial I think, because we had lots of expenses since we had young children. I was upset some of the time, because I felt that if someone comes in and sees a messy house, I'm the one who is going to be blamed and it bothered me. But what happened is that I basically got over being bothered, and the other thing is that Marty was really a fairly tidy person and he decided that he couldn't stand the mess, and we came to a new accommodation and that was great. Really it was a struggle, but people work these things out. It had sort of interesting consequences in the sense that our children learned to cook earlier than I would have ever introduced them to it. Once our son got to be 12, Martin said "hey look, if I have to make dinner, Jonathan can learn to cook too." I was impressed, because I never would have done it at that age. I would have waited a couple of years, but he was quite right. Jonathan was very interested in food and he needed some tuition, but he learned to make dinner once a week and I think that was really good for him and good for us. I was struck that I wouldn't have made that demand, he did, and he was right. It worked out well, and then our daughter came in when she was 12. I'm not sure whether this is all about how I became a feminist, but it is actually, it is. It's really about how you live your daily life or your life with people, your family, people with whom you are intimate. I hadn't expected to go into all of these little details about my personal life, but ok.

LB: I was going to ask you this a little bit later, but it seems sort of apropos at the moment. In what ways did you manage your professional career and your personal life at home?

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LGB: Right...

LB: Did you find it to be a struggle?

LGB: I've just given some of this, some of the personal struggle.

LB: Yes

LGB: Well professionally, obviously I had been working full time until our first child was born, and we had a lot of discussion about that, but I wanted to spend some time with the children and Martin didn't feel that way. He said he would prefer to keep working full time. I felt that we each had a right to make our choices, so I worked half time for a number of years. At that time, even though in some sense I don't approve of it, sexism made it easy for me to work half time and for him to work full time. Academic institutions were willing to say "oh well yes, you want to stay home part of the time, that's ok." For the way the world is set up, or the way the academic world is set up, or the professional or business, whatever world is set up, it's not good for your career to work half time, that is just a fact. On the other hand, we live in a society that is not very friendly to family needs, and as far as I'm concerned, we really should change the social demands to make work more family friendly and there are many, many ways in which that needs to be done. Is that an answer?

LB: Most definitely, and I very much agree with that. You mentioned that for you feminism is a lot about how you live your daily life, and I noticed in a lot of your research you don't necessarily bring your feminism to bear on what you are doing research wise. Was that a conscious decision to keep those two separate?

LGB: No. I got my PhD with Donald Hebb in physiological psychology, which I really loved. Well, I've loved most of it, so I shouldn't really, but I was just thinking back to how I felt as a graduate student full of this kind of fervour and excitement and so on. I went from one thing to another in terms of my research interests, depending on a number of factors, but I wasn't a social psychologist. I only gradually became a psychologist who looked at cognitive and perceptual development. That already was a big shift for me, which took a number of years. It wasn't that I didn't want to do feminist work, it's just that wasn't where my research interests and skills lay. I thought about it about, but I thought I'm not a social psychologist, I wasn't planning to re-train as a social psychologist. I did a lot in academia of a feminist nature; that is, I taught. When we were in Santa Barbara, and this was the late '60s until '71, then we came back to New York, I introduced a Psychology and Women course, which I taught for a couple of years. I was part of a consciousness raising group, and there was a woman who wrote *Fascinating Womanhood*, Helen Andelin. There was a big public forum, I can't remember who put it on, but they asked the university if they would send somebody to debate or discuss with Helen Andelin, and I was interested in doing it and there wasn't another candidate, so social psychologist or not, there I was and we had, well I thought we had a fine time. I thought we definitely won.

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In Santa Barbara, the most important feminist thing I did, that I think is the most important feminist thing although other people may not, is that there was a group, mostly students, that wanted to establish a child care centre and I was really hot for this. We worked for quite a number of months on this and we actually found a space, this was very exciting. The thing is, that I was the only faculty member in that group, which is pretty disgraceful. My children at that point were even too old for it. It wasn't that I was doing it literally for myself, but I knew what it was like to need childcare and that it was hard to find good childcare. If we could get childcare on the campus, that would be so terrific for the students, for administrators, for faculty, for everybody.

This went on for quite a long time and eventually a graduate student and I wrote the proposal, and since I was the only faculty member, I was the one who went to the administration and made an argument for it. The graduate student, became a very good friend of mine, because we worked so passionately together, you couldn't help but bond in a very real way. It was really funny, because the Dean really disapproved of this because he thought women should stay home and raise their children. He really disapproved of this, however there were enough other people in administration who approved and when we finally got permission this was really a great day. We got a group of volunteers – everybody's partner, or child, or friend – we got all of these men and women together over a period of about a week and we painted the structure that they had given us and fixed it up for kids. One of the big jobs, was putting a fence around the area so there was a play area for the kids, and why I'm telling you this story is because this Dean who disapproved of the whole thing came and helped us put up the fence. I was very, very touched by that. He really thought women should stay home, but he thought it was important that we have a good childcare centre, that there was a good fence and a good structure and I found that touching in its own way. When it started, it had a lot of community control and over the years the university took over and that is a very complicated political story. I left, we moved to New York. I visited, I can't remember exactly when, it must have been in the late '70s, visited Santa Barbara and I was so thrilled. That child care centre is still there and, in fact, they had done a lot of good work on the building. We were a bunch of amateurs and there was virtually no community control then, but I understood the university provided the facilities and a lot of the money. Although people paid, there was a sort of sliding scale. I might have liked community control or more community control, but it was a really a very good thing that had been accomplished.

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LB: Definitely. That's something, that I think more universities still need today.

LGB: That's right. It was easier to do there, because it was easier to find space. I have done a lot of feminist work in academia, but when I came to New York, we came because NYU [New York University] really wanted my husband and they gave me a 3 year contract and actually I was not there a very long time, but some graduate students approached me and said that they wanted a course in Psychology and Women. I said, "look, I can't teach a graduate course in that," because I'm not sufficiently knowledgeable, I really felt that way.

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This was '71, or maybe the fall or spring of '72. I said, what I would do is have a collaborative seminar and I would get Sally [Sara] Ruddick and Nancy Goldberger and an anthropologist –

whose name I can't remember, because I didn't in fact know her, I think Nancy brought her in – and then we had another philosopher that Sally brought in, so there were 5 of us. I'm sorry I can't remember the names. I remember the 3 people that I personally knew. We had a wonderful time, because not only did we meet with the students, but we ourselves met as a group separately because we felt we had to work out a lot of kinks and decide what positions we wanted to take and to present. It was really a very exciting time, because we ourselves had an exciting seminar going and then we had the broader sort of class seminar; that was a great thing. I was only at NYU for about 2 years, and then it didn't hold together. I think I was the one that held it together, and it was in psychology and none of the other people except Nancy were in psychology, but she wasn't actually at NYU at that time. Then I moved to Barnard College, and there I was very active. I worked with a group of people to establish Women's Studies and that was a long, arduous task. And then, because there was no tenured woman who would chair it, because even in a women's college this was not an esteemed field. Everybody was a little afraid; nobody wanted to step up, so I ended up chairing it for the first year. I was already the chair of the Psychology department, but I couldn't stand the idea that there would be a non-tenured person. What could a non-tenured person do in establishing Women's Studies? They would have absolutely no power. They would be in no position to demand anything, to set standards. You would be putting a non-tenured person in an impossible position. It would be bad for them and bad for the program, because they couldn't do anything. So I did it for the first year and I convinced Mirra Komarovsky, do you know who she is?

LB: No.

LGB: Oh wow, that is amazing. That is sort of like what Rhoda Unger said, how one doesn't know. She wasn't even such a foremother, I mean she was a foremother, but she wasn't that long ago. She was alive and well in the '70s; I've forgotten when she died. She was a sociologist, but she was very well known as someone that worked on women's issues. It's really surprising, because even I knew her name before I went to Barnard.

LB: It just goes to show how much of this gets lost.

LGB: Oh yes, well I'm sure it's not lost in sociology.

AR: Maybe just be a disciplinary divide that we're experiencing.

LGB: Yes, maybe something like that, but still. So anyway, she agreed to chair it and she was a very prestigious person. She was not young, but nevertheless it was great to have her do it and I certainly could not have carried this on, particularly because I was hired to chair the Psychology department, so I could hardly keep dividing myself this way. I worked with the women's centre, with other people of course. I may have been influential in the childcare centre, but in the work at Barnard, aside from doing this year of chairing the department, which I thought was protecting a new department, this was always a group effort. I worked with other women to establish a parental leave policy.

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You would think a place like Barnard would have a parental leave policy, but they didn't. This is a prestigious woman's college and known for work on women's issues, but they didn't. Which meant that individual women in the department had to negotiate individually with their chair to take a leave if they were pregnant and had a child or adopted. It took a long time, but we wrote a policy, but then it took 2 years for it to go through the administration. There now is a parental leave policy and it isn't exactly what we originally wrote. But that's life and it's better and it means that the onus is not on the individual faculty member to negotiate with the chair, who may or not be sympathetic with their position. So it's true, my feminist activities didn't show themselves in the research that I did, but they showed themselves in everything else I did. It's just that I felt that I wasn't about to change my line of research and I would have to learn to be a social psychologist and I really wasn't.

LB: I want to come back to when you said you started up the women's studies program.

LGB: Actually, I didn't start up the women's studies program. Let's be very clear, there was a group of women who worked very hard at Barnard.

LB: Yes, you were a part of the collective. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit more about how that started to come about.

LGB: Well, actually, there were a few women who were already working on this, Susan Sacks, Hester Eisenstein. I'm trying to think of whom else, this was a long time ago. We had the support of the Women's Centre. The Barnard Women's Centre, is called the Centre for Research on Women, was really a pioneer. Catherine Stimpson, is that a name anyone knows?

LB: No.

LGB: Wow. it's really amazing. Sorry, apologies, they are not psychologists, but Catherine Stimpson was very active in the women's movement in its early days in New York. She was just known, I think everywhere, she was in literature. She was a very good speaker and a little flamboyant, so everybody knew Kate. Anybody who was interested in women's issue knew Kate. Well, I think everybody knew Kate. She was active in the women's centre when it was established, this is before I was ever at Barnard, somewhere in the 60s. Then Jane Gould became the director of the Women's Centre and she was a very energetic, organized, committed women. It was a vibrant place. It still is, by the way. Does anybody know about the annual Scholar & the Feminist at Barnard? No? That's really a shame. The Women's Centre and Jane Gould established this annual Scholar & Feminist, because she felt there was a lot of interesting scholarly work going on that wasn't accessible to many people and this was like an open conference that people could come to. This is still going on. It's changed its form in many ways, but it has a wonderful history. Okay, so how did I get to that? Because you asked about the early work in establishing Women's Studies. Jane Gould and the Women's Centre were extremely supportive. Our meetings were all held in the women's centre, if we wanted to Xerox any material, I think they may even have typed up stuff for us, they were solid support.

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It wasn't the administration that supported us. It was the Women's Centre that provided whatever we needed, which was not a lot, but nevertheless we felt that it was the only administrative unit that welcomed us and provided support. There was a small group, half a dozen, maybe sometimes we were more and we just met.

The history department had Annette Baxter, which is probably not a name you know, but in history she was known for the work she had done on women in history. We tried to get people to teach a course in their department. We tried to get enough courses in each department so that we could say that someone could have a sort of program. Before Women's Studies was established as a major, it was established as a program. I don't remember the exact dates on this. You could major in something and take courses in this Women's Studies program and it counted as a minor and we had a lot of complicated requirements that I don't remember all of them, but they were really complex. There was a committee on instruction that had standards and that meant that "we didn't want you getting away with an easy program in Women's Studies that were all these fun courses," it had to be solid.

Barnard is a great place and academically it's very good. On the other hand, at that time women's colleges were more stringent on their demands on Women's Studies than other colleges, and women's colleges were not among the first colleges to establish Women's Studies programs by the way. It was considered not solid, not respectable, but that's because the male system of values determined the value of courses, so it's not surprising. Women's colleges were very sensitive on this point and they wanted to show themselves as more solid than everybody else. For example, when I got to Barnard, the Psychology department major was a lot more stringent than the Colombia Psychology department major. We demanded statistics, which any psychology department would have, but the Colombia department did not. It was unbelievable. I was appalled. They actually improved their major as a result of better communication, and the fact they then had people there who said, "oh gee, we really need to have statistics as one of the requirements." Barnard had this if not from the beginning, at least for many years before Colombia.

There was a program and then as students were interested and as courses were developed. There was always a committee with members from different departments that ran the program. We tried to drum up additional courses, which we did. Then at some point, it must be the early '80s, we finally had enough courses so we finally established Women's Studies. I chaired it for that first year and then Mirra Komarovsky chaired it for a couple of years. I can't remember whether it was right after her or not, but it was really important to have a tenured person in there. We then had a search committee and I was on sabbatical or something. I was on leave, I wasn't there, I can't remember why. We hired Natalie Kampen, who had been at Rhode Island University, she is in art history, a great feminist. I'm just trying to remember whether there was somebody in between. I don't remember. I'm sorry, I didn't think to look this stuff up. The committee was just established that you were going to hire a tenured person. I say all this, because in a way there was a certain pain in it because there were some non-tenured women feminists, who were very good people, but were not going to make tenure because they didn't do the kind of research that that academic institution wanted.

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You have to understand, that in order to get tenured at Barnard the ad hoc committee of 5 people consisted of 3 Colombia people and 2 Barnard people. It meant you had to satisfy some Colombia requirements, their ideas, and that was really a terrible problem. One of the first things I did was hire Mary Parlee, whose work I thought was fantastic, and I wanted her in the department. I didn't want to teach Psych and Women, I wanted someone who worked in Psych and Women, not me, and I hired Mary, whose work I really love. Despite much work, I could not get Mary tenured. It was really a great sorrow in my life.

AR: What were the specific reactions?

LGB: The Colombia department did not support her, and I thought that maybe they would because her early work has a couple of papers in vision research. I thought she's established her credentials, so now she writes other kinds of stuff, but she has a "solid" background. They finally said, the bottom line was, "we don't have any need or use for such a person, with her areas of interest. Our students are not interested." It isn't that they said she's a bad person. They just said, "we are not interested in supporting her and if the corresponding department at Colombia doesn't support somebody then forget it." The way the Ad Hoc is held, people come in and you are interviewed and they ask you questions and so on. I don't know what the Colombia person said, but they could well have said, "she is a good person and she has this early work in vision research, but now she is doing this other stuff." But what they told me that they said is, "we have no need for a person in her field." Now actually, in more recent times, because of much objection by Barnard faculty, it isn't 3-2, it's 2-2 and the fifth person is selected by Colombia, but after negotiation with Barnard. It's a little better, it's definitely better. Barnard is more assertive than it was at the time. As I say it was a terrible experience not to get her tenured, because I valued her and her work so much.

AR: She wrote some really valuable review articles in *Signs* and Psychology *of Women*, and I've been trying to get in touch with her for this project, but haven't been successful in getting a response.

LGB: Really? I don't know why, she is sort of withdrawn. I haven't seen her myself in a long time. I was thinking I must make more of an effort to try to get a hold of her. She was doing some work on transgender, and I'm sure it's good work, but she has somehow withdrawn from psychology. Now where were we that I got on to Mary?

LB: The development of Women's Studies.

LGB: Women's studies has taken off and is really in great shape, I would say, at Barnard. Tally [Natalie] Kampen has been the chair. Other people have too. They have rotated around, which is the appropriate way to do it in my point of view. Women's Studies is now a department, it is not a program, done a number of years ago. Certainly when Tally came, it was already a department. We couldn't hire her unless she was going to head a department. Women's Studies is well established at Barnard and I feel happy to have played a role. This was definitely a communal effort, but I was really happy and I felt pleased, like it was an accomplishment. I really feel good about that.
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AK: You just mentioned a colleague that you really wanted to hire, but couldn't because of her view on psychology and what her work was. Have you experienced any kind of explicit discrimination based on your feminist views?

LGB: You mean against myself?

AK: Yes, something explicit. Attitudes or the like.

LGB: The Colombia department that initially welcomed me when I was hired by Barnard, well one of the members said to me some years along the way, "well isn't all that feminist work you do just politics?" He was saying this isn't really academic work. He certainly felt that I was not up to the Colombia standard. When I first went to Barnard, Colombia was part of the search committee that selected me. They welcomed me and after I was there for about a year, they said "why don't we make this a joint department. You'll have graduate students, there will be all these nice things, and it will be good for the faculty." I had no intention of doing this, because I wanted a feminist department and I knew it wouldn't be a feminist department there. But what they really wanted, this isn't answering your question, but I can't resist saying it. I was the only tenured person at that point, and if we were a combined department they, who were over-tenured, would get tenured slots.

Once I went to Barnard I certainly didn't feel any discrimination on the basis of my feminist interests and feminist activities. Maybe there were some people who I knew, psychologist men, who were not interested. Maybe they thought less of me. I don't know. But since I was very involved in Barnard and in the research I was doing, I don't remember experiencing any.

AR: What about discrimination based on your gender at any point? Not just at Barnard, but in your career?

LGB: I think there was probably a lot of that, although I was unaware of it at some points. It took feminist thinking to make me aware sometimes. When I was a graduate student I think that Don Hebb was very good on these issues. Some of his best students were women. He had an investment in women. After getting my degree I came to New York and I worked in a neuropsychology lab with someone called Hans-Lucas Teuber. I don't know if you know the name. He was very well-known. We were small. We were three people and Lucas made the fourth. We were two women and one man. At one point there was a question of giving people raises and he didn't have much money. The other man in the lab, when I went there, actually didn't quite have his degree and then he got his degree. Lucas called me in at one point and said "look, Sid is married and has a child and he now has his degree and he needs a raise. I can't give you a raise if I give him a raise, but he needs it and you don't." The reality is that that was true. I was married at the time, and while we didn't have much money, there were two people that had an income. Sid's wife didn't. I accepted this. Just on a human basis, that is a good decision, somebody has more need. I felt that he treated me respectfully; he called me in and said this is the situation.

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I thought about it many years later and I thought, "would he have done that if I were a man?" If I was a man and I had this job and I didn't have any children, would he say to a man, "Look, this man needs the money more because he has a child and you don't"? I doubt that Lucas would have done that. But I will never know.

I'll tell you one of the subtler ones, in a way. I remember that after my second marriage and after I had children…it was Bob [Robert] Malmo, who was part of the McGill faculty and a very nice guy and I got along well with him, and so on. When I met him at a meeting, he would always say to me, and remember that he was very friendly, he would always say "how many children do you have now, is it three or four?" I only have two. I never had more than two and he couldn't remember that there were only two. I felt that that he was seeing me differently now. He wasn't just relating to me as a colleague.

I bet there are a lot of ways that I am not remembering. I spent a number of years at George Washington University, because my husband was at Walter Reed [Army Medical Center] and I had some grant money, so I could move to George Washington University. They were willing to take my overhead on the grant. Jackie [Jacqueline] Goodenough and I were there at the same time, we became fast friends. There they had these two women, who were really quite productive and moderately well-known and they had us there on the cheap. And we taught a course and so on. They wouldn't have treated men that way. Men would have made a different demand. That's the thing that was clear to me. If I were a man I would behaved differently. I don't regret it actually. So it's one of those funny things. I behave in a sexist way; they behave in a sexist way. But it was sort of convenient, if you know what I mean.

LB: You were the associate editor for the *Psychology of Women Quarterly* for a while. I was wondering if you could tell me how you got involved with doing that?

LGB: Right, that was when Nancy Henley was the editor and it was because I knew her a bit and we sort of got along. She asked if I would be the associate editor and I said I would, although I didn't think I had much to contribute, because I didn't think many of the articles would be ones that I would be a good editor for. Which is in fact what happened. There were some sort of political or other issues about articles, particularly in a journal like that. I sort of participated and I was in charge of some papers and I would send them out and engage in negotiation with the reviewers and authors and so on, but I didn't have a lot to do. After about a 3 or 4 year term I said "I think I'll resign, not because I'm not supportive, but just because you should have someone who reviews more paper than I do." I really was happy that the journal existed, and I want to support it. In fact, I didn't review a lot of paper and I felt they should have someone who did. I was there for a least 3 years and that was good. I still get the journal and read it.

LB: I think we have to start wrapping up and get you off the hot seat, but I'm just wondering if there is anything else you want to tell us, any anecdotes or stories, anything that you feel is important that we need to touch on.

LGB: I'm sure there was a lot of discrimination that I wasn't aware of.

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AR: A lot of people we have interviewed for this project have said that, that they are sure that they did not have the context to understand what was going on.

LGB: Exactly.

AK: I've noticed that you have worked with a lot of feminists outside of psychology and one of the questions is what is the future, in your opinion, of feminist psychology? Do you think that maybe feminist psychology needs to expand and work with more feminist academics in others fields, like you've done? It seems like you've worked with sociologists, anthropologists, philosophers, and so on.

LGB: That's a really good question. That is a really complicated issue. I think is that Psychology of Women has only to benefit from working with people outside of psychology, I take that sort of as a given. The question is for me, is Psychology and Women going to exist within psychology or can we transform psychology enough so that all psychology is psychology of women, and men, and is non-classist, non-racist. I feel that that somehow is the big question. How can we expand psychology so that it isn't a White male enterprise, with these other groups coming in and claiming a share? It's that one really has to transform psychology.

AR: That's really interesting that you say that. One of things going on in Division 35 [of the American Psychological Association] right now is a task force to try and address the question of "has feminist psychology really changed psychology or not?" And there are a lot of divided opinions on that. First you have to define what does "transform" mean, which is thorny. But that's the question, what do we mean by that? It is a major epistemological shift and has feminism accomplished that in psychology?

LGB: No, but I myself think that that is really what we have to do and I'm glad to hear that there is discussion about that.

AR: Could I ask a real quick question? Clearly we are all interested in the history of your feminism in psychology, but I am also really interested in the history of psychology more generally. You were at McGill in the late '40s and '50s and you were working with Hebb, who is a really big name in psychology. Brenda Milner was also there, did you know her?

LGB: Brenda is a good friend of mine. I was at her 90th birthday in September – her birthday is actually in July. She turned 90 in July and she is still active at the Neuro [Montreal Neurological Institute] and they threw a big party. There was a day of talks and seminars and then a big dinner. I went up for it. It really was wonderful and it was just a great thing. Brenda and I have been very good friends, since we were graduate students. I know, in some sense, I know some of the big names in physiological psychology, whereas I never achieved that in developmental or perception.

AR: I am curious about the shift in your career and research trajectory, from physiological over to developmental cognitive processes. How did that happen?

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LGB: Partly sexism. I was working in Teuber's lab and the idea was I was working on this project and he encouraged me to develop some independent work. There are a lot of brain injured people who had difficulty with spatial tasks and I know that children do, they read things the wrong way and they copy things the wrong way. So I thought to myself maybe if I understood the development, maybe I would understand how it fell apart, and I still think that's a good idea.

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I thought I'll study children for two years or so. I'll figure this out. I got interested in studying some aspects of spatial perception in children, but then a number of things happened. The lab actually broke apart, because Lucas Teuber moved to MIT and Josephine Semmes moved to Washington and although we continued to meet in New York and finishing writing up some stuff. I then got a job in the paediatrics department of [SUNY] Downstate Medical School, and that was because a psychiatrist was hired by the paediatrics department because the head of the paediatrics department said "the problems in paediatrics are behavioural. We've solved some of the big other problems." So he hired a psychiatrist. And this guy who I knew, Al Friedman, wanted an experimental psychologist on his staff, because he felt they know about how to do research and so on. I did guide and teach a lot of the physicians and I worked on a preemie project. I worked with a paediatrician on electroencephalography in infants, because I had done EEG work as part of my dissertation.

I also wanted to get some teaching experience. I was tired of being in a medical school. I wanted to be in a psychology department. I went to City College, which limited their class size, and I spoke to the head of the department and I said, "I would like to teach one of sections of physiological psychology" and he said, "no." But he said, "I will offer you a course in developmental psychology." I said, "I'm not a developmental psychologist, I haven't taken a course, I don't know anything about it." He said, "that's all right, you'll learn, you're a woman, just keep a chapter ahead." I said, "no." But the next year I came back, because I started doing some work with children and I thought maybe it would be a good idea. I'd learn developmental psychology. So that's what happened. I worked at the medical school and did some physiological work, this electroencephalography stuff, but I was doing some perceptual work myself as part of my research activity. But then I began to teach developmental psychology and I found that when I went to meetings – once I began giving papers in developmental psychology – I found that people, well I found a lot of women for one thing. Whereas in physiological psychology at that time, or experimental if you did something in perception, they were all men, virtually. I sort of found it so much more hospitable. There were people to talk to in a different way. I didn't feel I had to be careful about what I said. I felt more welcomed. It was a gradual move. After all, I was fellow in the section of physiological and Division 3 of experimental, and it was only later when someone decided to nominate me for Division 7, but that's not where I was for a long time. I'm not unhappy, but there really was a lot of sexism in my move into developmental.

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