

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

**Interview with Lisa Rubin
Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Brooklyn, NY
March 6, 2012**

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Interview with Lisa Rubin

Interviewed by

Brooklyn, NY

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LR – Lisa Rubin, interview participant

AR – Alexandra Rutherford, interviewer

LR – My name is Lisa Rubin and my date of birth is March 8th, 1975, in Brooklyn, New York where we are now.

AR – Oh my gosh! I didn't know you were born here. Neat.

LR – Yeah, I was.

AR – Ok, so we'll start off with our standard question, which is actually, I think, one of the most interesting questions, which is how did you become a feminist? Tell us a little bit about how you developed an identity as a feminist.

LR – Yeah, I've been thinking about this, because I don't think there was this, sort of, watershed moment, and I am of a generation that grew up with feminism to some degree in the water. Not necessarily in my family, not necessarily in my household. I didn't have a mom who was sort of on the front lines, or father who was on the front lines of the women's movement. But I think I grew up in an environment where social issues mattered, and being Jewish, that can be part of your identity, just being more attuned and primed to issues of social discrimination. So I can't remember a time where women's issues didn't matter to me, where gender issues didn't matter to me, but it probably wasn't until college that I called myself a feminist.

I think a few earlier things happened before then that made it very easy when I got to college to say, "Well of course I would be part of the feminist group on campus!" You know, that would be the first place that I would gravitate towards. One was that I had this fabulous English teacher in high school. People like this really matter. He was somebody who had been involved in the civil rights movement, and even though it was a literature class, a writing class, it shaped a lot of the classroom environment. So we had a project that was in sophomore year honours English and we lived in Connecticut and we'd go into the city and everybody had to become an expert on one little thing. When I say little thing, it could be manholes or water towers. You had to learn the history of it. It was fascinating. My mom went to NYU and my family is from New York, and [I thought that] maybe I'll do something in the Village. You know, [I was] a sophomore in high school [in the] late '80s, so [I was thinking about] something in the Village and I started doing my research. My mom's talking about the triangle fire and I'm trying to figure out what to do.

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Somehow, in my pre-internet research, I come across a brand new school, maybe two years old, called the Harvey Milk School. So I thought this sounds interesting. It was a school for LGBT, although I think back then it was just called gay youth. It was maybe two rooms in the Hetrick-Martin Institute. Most of the kids who were at the school were homeless, and had gotten there from pretty traumatic pasts, to arriving at the school. They faced a lot of teasing, or abuse and violence. I just became really concerned and interested and I was thinking this was going to be my project. They actually did a great job. They had comic books that really spoke to the issues of suicide, suicidal ideation, violence, all those sorts of things. So I think in some ways that was both my introduction to psychology at a young age, and then also to thinking about issues of discrimination, marginalization and sexual identity.

Somehow, to me, this was a really important issue, and [I thought that] of course, my peers will think it's important. It didn't feel like a statement to me to take on a project like that. Then as it came closer, I'm working on the project, I'm really learning so much and, I think, expanding my worldview [and] my understanding. It's really challenging; I didn't recognize it as such, but recognizing my own privilege, how lucky I was, [thinking], "If I were to come out, if this were happening to me, how would my parents react as compared with these kids?" But anyway, I think I hadn't anticipated that there would be any issues in my class around this. So as it got closer and we were preparing, actually what we would do was stand on the street with a bullhorn and give our paper about the history of whatever topic we were doing. So as it got a little closer, there were a few students in my class who were basically making homophobic comments. I don't even remember the specific details. I was like, this is a safe space for students. I'm not going to take my classmates who are now potentially going to say something that would make that an unsafe space. So just having to navigate that, even. In the end we went to Stonewall, which was also great. There was no history of the gay movement in my classes up until then, so [I had] to choose another venue, [and think of] what would be a meaningful venue.

I think that early event probably also laid some seeds. That [is part of my] history, and then growing up at the time (and I'm not sure that that time is any different) [of] the height of media attention around eating disorders. My best friend had a very, very serious eating disorder and I think, perhaps by even late in high school [I] even [had] my own struggles around body issues and eating issues. [I was] beginning to identify that as a feminist issue. So I think those two things were probably major influences that, at least when I got to college, made me think this was something I wanted to become involved with. There were a lot of contradictions though. I was in a sorority and everyone in the sorority was in the feminist organization and we would talk about why we were not allowed to have parties in our sorority house. Eventually I left the sorority because of those contradictions that were ultimately very uncomfortable to me. So there was a lot of living with contradiction.

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Then I think the story of becoming a feminist really connects with perhaps other questions that you'll ask because it's so connected to my own interest in psychology, that they developed together. It wasn't [that] I was already such a feminist and then I found psychology.

AR – They kind of grew up together.

LR – Yeah.

AR – Well let me ask a little bit more about your feminist awareness that came around the eating disorder issue, because that's something that I think, I mean you've subsequently done work on that as well, but I'm around the same age as you are, maybe just a few years older, but I know that that was certainly something that, in my generation, really effected relationships and navigating through college. Do you have a sense of when you began to think about eating disorders from a feminist frame? Within a feminist frame? Is there any kind of retrospective kind of event or book or conversation that led you to see it more from that perspective?

LR – Yeah, I think a few things. [There were] a few different trajectories. One was thinking about [and] realizing that I connected weight issues with morality in a way, or with identity in a way, and that's sort of hard. [I had] my own struggles with body issues and [I was] thinking, “What does it mean to be bigger? What does it mean to be smaller?” There is a piece of my own internalized anti-Semitism within that, [from] growing up in Connecticut (in a fairly Jewish town) but playing field hockey and not totally fitting in. I think [I was] connecting bigness with Jewishness and taking up too much space in the world. There was something even in articulating that that [made me think] that's weird. That's striking. So again, I think that initial idea making me think that (even at a young age) there's clearly something more about embodiment or the body (I don't think I thought “embodiment”) and why that connection [exists]. Then I think from there, probably coming across Susie Orbach's Hunger Strike and that kind of writing [made me start] to think about “fat as a feminist issue.” Then [there was] the work of Esther Rothblum, leading up to my own honours thesis which was, for me, really thinking that feminism had changed so much of how I thought about body issues and isn't this just the cure? [I was thinking] in a very naïve, sweet way, I think.

AR - If everybody read my work, we could eliminate eating disorders!

LR – Exactly! So I could have everybody read a two page...

AR – So tell us, this is about your honours thesis. Tell us about that.

{10:35}

LR – Yeah, exactly. [It was about] feminist consciousness raising intervention and then looking at media ads. It was those ads, the Kate Moss ads, the Calvin Klein ads. I think I

have a bound copy of [them] that are in my honours thesis. So in looking at the studies that had been done at that point, we still have the data to support that in new ways. It wasn't such a focus on objectification, but [I was] wondering at the very least if a feminist message might buffer negative body image. It turned out that you need to do more than read a paragraph or two that I wrote.

AR – I know. We think we're going to do big things with our little manipulations. I was in the same boat doing stuff like that.

LR – So I think that was a big part of it. Reading [about] that connection around realizing there's more inscribed on bodies than meanings around race and class as well as finding connections in a lot of feminist psychology, really.

AR – You did your undergrad at Lafayette College. Can you recall when you were exposed to feminist psychology in Lafayette?

LR – Yes, and Susan Basow and I joke about the fact that I actually never took her psychology of women course. She was instrumental to [my finding feminism]. I'm coming to her with some of these interests and [knowing] that this was a place that those could develop and thrive and I could ask someone this question. We worked quite closely together, at least [in] my junior and senior year, and that just happened.

It can't be completely by happenstance, but I remember one summer I didn't know [if I] was going to be a psych major, or [if I] was going to major in government law. What was I going to be doing? I was trying to figure out what my courses would be and I called the psych department for some advising. Who does that? Somehow I got the chair of the department, which was Susan, on the phone. She'd been on sabbatical during my freshman year. So I didn't have that [course], and I don't know that I would have found that in my freshman year anyway. She [said], "Come to campus, meet with me in the fall." So that was part of my sophomore year. Like I said, [I had been] very involved in women's issues and it was called the Association for Lafayette Women (ALW) [and we had] a room in the student center. It was partly a social space, and partly where, just being in there reminded you of your day because you'd have lunch there, and somebody was always working on some project. That, and then ultimately constructing my thesis [was my introduction to feminism at Lafayette].

AR – Tell us a little bit, then, about your trajectory into grad school. How did you decide what you were going to do and where you ended up and that kind of thing?

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LR – I think that early on in undergrad, we actually had an event that was quite useful that I've tried to do on campuses since that...let me back up, actually. I struggled with whether I wanted to follow a path of social psych or clinical psych because ultimately my interests sort of crossed the two. I wonder if I should go back even further, like, how did I even know that I wanted to go to graduate school? I think both doing my thesis was a

very cool experience of realizing on the one hand [that] I could bring something I'm really passionate about and turn it into questions. I have this idea and I could at least test it out. In that case, I don't want to say it was humbling, but things are more complicated than that. I'm not a particularly creative person, but it was a space, doing research, that somehow I tapped into an aspect of creativity that I felt very comfortable with. So I really enjoyed the research. I did some summer research experiences when I was home. So I came to appreciate both the mundane as well as the more creative aspects of research. I really enjoyed that and I think that's part of why I wanted to [continue].

AR – So you kind of knew you wanted to do research somehow.

LR – Yeah, and I was surprised, just like I think many undergraduates are that I would enjoy this because it was not what I assumed. I think earlier on when I was thinking about majoring in psychology I probably thought I would become a clinical psychologist and you have that image in your mind. That no longer seemed like, at least primarily, [something I] would do. Or at the very least, I thought research would be an important component of that.

The fact that I would probably think about graduate school at all probably relates to my own class privilege. Both my parents actually went to graduate school so [I wasn't really] thinking, "What am I going to do with a psych major?" And, as I said, [I also felt] passionate about it. I think that combination...

AR – Given that it was sort of expected that that would be your route.

LR – Exactly. Very different from, for example, a very dear friend I had in graduate school who was the first person in her family to go to college, let alone [grad school]. Her family couldn't understand [because she had] this college degree, why would you spend more time in school?

AR – Right! And get into debt when you could be out working.

LR – Exactly. So I think I really had the support from family, the community, that this was "what you do." And it fit with what I wanted to do so I was thinking in that regard. [However] I was very selective when I applied to graduate school. At that point, I knew I wanted to study feminist psychology.

AR – I was going to ask. Did you have that in your sight, that you knew you could do that?

LR – Yeah. It's funny. I remember the process of applying to graduate programs, or selecting graduate programs, and I had this book, [something like an] insiders guide to clinical kind of thing. So ultimately, in terms of the question of social versus clinical, I had a pragmatic side to me. I [thought], well, maybe [it's] not a bad idea to do clinical. I also [sort of realized] that I both had clinical interests and that there was a space, there

were a few different places where there was a space where those interfaced and there was an appreciation for where social and clinical issues did interface.

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When it came time to apply for programs, I really tried to identify programs that fit with my interests. Ultimately [I sort of went back to] my own thesis. Who was I citing? I [realized] that's who I want to work with, actually. [That] basically led me to three graduate programs, which I think is unusual. I thought I'd apply. I didn't apply right away. I worked for a year in research and then applied and I [said], "These are the programs that I think would be perfect places for me." And really, [it was] only two of three. Somehow one stayed in the mix. So [there were] two of three programs that I had a sense, at least on paper, that these folks are doing work that I want to do. Those two folks were Esther Rothblum (and I didn't get into Vermont) (laughs) ?? (19:02) but I'm still such a huge fan of her work and that was very influential to me, and then Carol Nemeroff who is who I ended up working with. I was very lucky. Susan told me, "You know when you interview at ASU (Arizona State University), you should also look up Nancy Felipe Russo." So I remember being at my interview and knocking on her door and saying, "I'm here for an interview for the clinical program, but I'm really interested in feminist psychology." [I was] both lucky, but also [I had] really chosen a place that I felt was [right].

[For] Carol, I don't know if she identified as a feminist, but she was excited about my interests and was comfortable with where I was coming from. I think that she sort of journeyed there with me.

AR – Well, we've interviewed Esther Rothblum for the project, so I know a little bit about her work. Tell us a little bit more, then, about when you did get to grad school, how did your ideas develop? You got interested in pregnancy and pregnant embodiment. How did that all happen?

LR – That all came later, actually, in a way. I think that I was very interested still, in the moral meanings of the body, so fat prejudice therefore was a big piece of that, and understanding that. Carol['s approach was] that you are what you eat, and [we looked] at those kinds of issues with discrimination. [That] was my initial interest. But then I became really interested in another question that I think still connected to my honours thesis taking it in a different direction, which was about resistance. How can we resist this and what are models of resistance?

So that was my initial thing that I wanted to study. What I'm going to have to do here, [since] I don't have any models of or measures of resistance, [is construct them]. I had constructed this whole study that I would look at resistance as a mediator between... I don't even remember what it was mediating, or what the predictor was. Certainly body image and body satisfaction, but again I think objectification was just barely in the mix in, like, 1998. So probably internalization is what we were talking about then. So I was going to have to run some focus groups, I guess, to find out what resistance is. I had

probably read *Disruptive Voices*, and I had read a little bit of feminist critique from research methodology, and I was certainly open to the idea of doing qualitative research, so that first year in graduate school [I became] much more immersed in that. Probably between college and graduate school [I was] reading more feminist critiques of methodology. I somehow came across Jill Morawski's work. Again, I hadn't taken a psychology of women class, so [I] was really always stumbling into this work, but becoming very interested in it.

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So I was organizing some focus groups with feminist women about resistance, which sort of led to a whole other set of issues in graduate school because I think [it was] my own awakening. No one had been talking about paradigms in science. It just wasn't in the mix. In my research methods class, [I was] bringing these questions in, being a very disruptive voice, where I adored my methods professor (we ended up working together), but at that particular moment, that was not what he wanted me bringing in and doing. I was once asked when I was raising questions about sampling, I remember asking my critical feminist questions about methods and that seemed so important to me, and is still so important to me. But of course at that time when you're first reading this, it felt like nobody's talking about this in my class!

AR – You were the lone voice, right?

LR – Well, then I kind of picked up. I think my passion was maybe a bit contagious and fell upon the right people who then have run with it much further than I have. My closest friend loves psychology and now has a doctorate in justice studies. So I had a shared [passion], which I think made a huge difference. I think I was in a community oriented clinical program, so there was some space to be talking about these issues. But at that point, I became a bit too disruptive and my professor asked all my classmates in my class of seven people whether they wanted to hear this critique from me. So all my classmates had to say [either] no I don't really want to hear [or] yes, I do really want to hear what Lisa has to say. So that was a bit threatening.

AR – What did they say?

LR – A few supported me, and a few said that I had belaboured the point. But the fact that the point kept coming up and needed to be brought up again, I guess that I really had belaboured the point enough, I suppose (laughs). What I think is very special is that there was no qualitative component of research methods when I took it, [but] that particular professor, actually three years later, was using a qualitative paper I had published in that course to teach about methods. So that was something very special about ASU, that openings were created and you felt like, even if your work was a little different, you could be part of the conversation. Even if it was rocky in the beginning, sometimes (laughs).

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So I was doing these focus groups, and then I [thought] I have to take a qualitative research methods class, which means I have to go outside the department. Then your eyes really open. I took a wonderful, very feminist oriented [course] and I actually selected that because of the particular instructor. [It was a] qualitative research methods course in communications. I was doing this work and I remember going to Carol one day and saying to Carol, my mentor, my graduate advisor, “What if the focus groups are enough for my master’s?” This is kind of big. I was learning a whole new method and doing it well, and so that was my master’s thesis, which was around feminism and body consciousness, but really was born out of my interest in resistance and coming up with a measure [for it], which I never did.

I think the pregnancy stuff came, partly, out of that. Two things came out of that. So that was one theme that was discussed within the focus groups. A few women were talking about feminism and body image and that actually, as much as feminism had influenced their body image, things like pregnancy had really changed how they had lived in their body. So that kind of planted some seeds. But that wasn’t the first place I went. My interest in resistance (and we just read this in the psychology of women class yesterday that I teach) was reading Patricia Hill Collins, reading bell hooks, as well, so really as a white Jewish woman, my mind was being dramatically transformed by black feminist thought. So my focus groups that I had initially done around feminist body consciousness were predominantly, not exclusively, but predominantly with white women. That was not the study I wanted to do and I remember being in my own master’s defense and saying that there was a major problem with the study. Who’s going to call me out on it? Then I [went] ahead to do another study where I realized that recruiting from women’s studies wasn’t what I ought to be doing, but recruiting instead from critical race studies or other departments for my studies on body consciousness. Then [I should be] holding focus groups with women of colour on resistance and body image issues. [I wanted] women who had thought critically about issues of body and identity, but maybe weren’t showing up in the intro to women’s studies course. There were a few, but...

AR – How did that change what you heard?

LR – You know, I would say a major theme that came up in the feminist focus groups that were predominantly white women was a lot of guilt. I know feminism had made a dramatic difference, as the women in the focus groups were very engaged in activism at the individual level. I remember one woman [saying], “I would go to Barnes and Noble and take the free send-away for Self Magazine or free Cosmo that fall out when you [open the magazine], and just write on them [things like] ‘you cause eating disorders!’ and mail them in.” As well, [they participated in] collective action. That had made a difference, but also, it was almost a confessional, [with them saying], “Am I a terrible feminist because I still feel this way or that way?” That didn’t come up in [the other groups]. We did groups with Latina women, and because of the great diversity of who ended up being in those groups, there was probably more coherence in the focus groups we did with African American women, who I think in the particular groups we did, it

may have been a more homogenous group of middle class African American women who were taking critical race theory classes.

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So they, themselves, were influenced by the same things that I was influenced by as well, but I think there was a lot more talk of spirituality. Both groups actually talked about motherhood and mixed messages, and on the one hand really appreciating, (and this came up, if there was one commonality I would say across the two groups [this was it]), deeply appreciating mothers and feeling really conflicted about the ways in which women saw that their mom's wanted to prepare them, and different ways that moms prepare them. On the one hand, whether it was white women and moms preparing [them] for a world by saying, "I want you to be beautiful" and that's a way to navigate the world. That's simplistic, but you know, [a mother's] emphasis on appearance is so that you don't have to worry about things that [she] struggled with so you don't ever gain weight or you won't have to navigate. It's a protectionism that ends up then leading to problems. I think similar issues came up. I think [the issues] were more racialized, well, probably not more racialized, but more clearly [defined].

AR – Right.

LR – It's hard to see it. The other issues were racialized, [like] talk of hair straightening or other sorts of things. But there were parallels in the ways that moms were preparing daughters for a world in which there was sexism, in which there was sexism and racism, and then occasionally I think you heard more often within the focus groups with African American women, [about] moms who did other things, as well. [They] sort of prepared women [by saying], "You don't have to do that. There are alternatives."

AR – You talk about some of the books that you read, [such as] Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, and so on. Was that something that you really came to on your own? It sounds like your mentors weren't saying [that you should] have a more heterogeneous sample, a more ethnically diverse sample. Was it just something that you felt compelled to do?

LR – In some ways, the way the world of feminist psychology and figures of feminist psychology have influenced me, [including] people that I've never met, are still influencing me. I can't take full credit for that. I was very lucky that when I was a junior, Susan Basow invited me to write a chapter with her around adolescence. It was for Norine Johnson. Norine Johnson? Did I say that right?

AR – Yeah, she...

LR – She just passed away. Yeah. So that's who I'm thinking of. People who I've never met who still, I think, had an [influence]. Obviously reading people's work influences you, but in a more perhaps direct way. So she was putting out the book *Beyond Appearance: A New Look at Adolescent Girls*. Susan was invited to write a chapter on gender and invited me to write it with her. So I was working with her on that, and I was

sort of adding the bit about (that Norine I think really wanted to emphasise in the book) resistance. Really, the whole focus of *Beyond Appearance* was certainly, in the case of body image, [about thinking] beyond the “golden girl” syndrome. Let’s think about what populations are not being talked about and places that resiliencies were not being talked about.

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So it was through working on that chapter that I really came across (more within psychology, [though] a little with bell hooks, but more within psychology) black mothering. I think that sort of laid the seeds. It was really, I think, Norine’s book in a way, that I was lucky enough to be part of. And [also] Judy Worell. They were both editors of that. [They said] we needed to make sure that a range of women’s, or girl’s in this case, experiences were projected. It was also connected to my own coming into psychology and coming into feminism. It was also in response to *Reviving Ophelia*, and all those books that had come out at the AAUW (American Association of University Women) report, which made things look pretty bad for girls. Maybe we also need [to recognize] that things aren’t all bad for girls.

That turn encouraged me to go to the literature to supplement what Susan had done in terms of her work to really think about how we might begin thinking about issues of adolescent development outside the traditional context that they’re being talk about in. That had been more focused on white women. I was really lucky that I got to be the one to add that voice to the chapter, and then that really, I think, changed my work.

AR – It changed it going forward. Yeah.

LR – So my comps looked at culture and body image. I was still deeply interested in that, but I think I got stuck there in the way that sometimes you know a literature too well. You think [that] I can’t do better.

AR – What can I add? Right!

LR – So the turn to look at pregnancy and embodiment was, I’m embarrassed to say, perhaps my jumping ship (laughs). Ironically, now that I’m doing a lot of work on reproductive issues, things are sort of opening up a whole new field of research and interest.

AR – Well tell me a little bit about your dissertation research, [about] the topic and how you executed it methodologically. What was your approach at this point?

LR – My dissertation looked at pregnancy and embodiment and I’m still interested in this idea of resistance. I think that is still the core that runs through. At least that’s how I think of my work. Hopefully that’s evident. Or at least the questions about [resistance] are at the core of the work that I do. Again, coming out of that focus group, thinking [that] maybe it’s not just identity, but maybe also experiences that made me think about

fostering potentials for resistance and resilience. But I had never been pregnant. So what do I know about pregnancy embodiment? It sounds quite interesting.

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I decided I should do some interviews at that point. I also had to really immerse myself in that first course in qualitative research methods. I took several courses, I taught a course in qualitative research so I couldn't imagine not including a qualitative component in my study. At the same time, [I didn't want] the method to direct the question either. So at that point and at that time, objectification theory had really taken off and I had read some of Franzoi's work in thinking that we can think of our body as an object. We can think about our body as a process and maybe there was something about thinking about our body in terms of what it can do in the way that athletics may be protective or other things were maybe protective. Maybe there's something there within pregnancy, or maybe not!

There was some literature, but certainly there was a surprisingly limited amount of research on pregnancy and body image, and very little feminist research on pregnancy and body image. You could see that women were less likely to be actively engaged in eating disorders when they were pregnant, but of course many of them, symptom-wise, had moved beyond that in order to get pregnant. That also looked like it was a temporary [fix]. Eating issues may have disappeared for some women, but only temporarily. But there was nothing feminist in the works, so it was a potential contribution. So we were doing interviews with women about their experience of pregnancy

AR – These were feminist identified women?

LR – No. These were really diverse women. Diverse women. I would say [they were] diverse women socioeconomically, and religiously, but actually not so much in terms of ethnicity. I think there's still a major limitation of that in that particular work and that particular study. I did not do subsequent studies as I did in the other work. Then [I was] looking at developing a measure (that I didn't do for the other project), that I ended up doing here with the idea as body as process or body as object. The results ended up a little complicated. I think that I was studying women cross-sectionally in terms of pregnancy and body image, so I certainly can't make claims about whether women experience their body more as a process during pregnancy, but there does seem to be something protective to the extent that women were experiencing their body as a process and less so as an object. Those women had more positive attitudes about weight gain during pregnancy and fewer depressive symptoms. But they were very select sample of women, so I don't know what this means facing unattended pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies, so Nancy Russo's influence in terms of those questions, I think, still pervades that work. There's more to be done there.

{39:56}

AR – Yeah. Well, you can't do everything in one dissertation. Well tell me, you mentioned Nancy and you mentioned Carol Nemeroff. Tell me a little about the mentoring that you experienced as a graduate student.

LR – I feel so lucky, both from undergraduate and [graduate school]. Lucky, but [I] also made choices, without a doubt, to find feminist mentors, so I don't think it's just luck. I think that I was very lucky to have two mentors who let me do what I wanted to do. For some people that's a good approach, for some people that's not the best approach. I remember, in fact, meeting after meeting with Carol. Every once in a while, I'd be stuck on a topic [and] I'd be lying on the couch (not necessarily in a psychoanalytic way) [asking], "What's going on? What's the resistance?" I never operated well when somebody gave me a topic to study [because there was] data sitting around. But that's somebody else's question, not my question.

So they really gave me the freedom to develop the questions that I wanted to, and to take the time that I wanted to in doing it. I think that is important to me. So now as a mentor, I'm not somebody who says, "We have this data, here's what you're going to do." Unfortunately that's done sometimes. I knew that wouldn't work for me. I could never do that to somebody else. It would kill the passion. I think that having the space to do that, to go off and take the women's studies classes, the communications classes, the education classes, that I was taking [was great]. I was in a program that allowed that, and then also had mentorship [that allowed that]. So there was my direct mentorship and then a general environment. I can't say directly how people like Leona Aiken or Mary Davis who were also there helped enable my work and my growth, I felt, if for no other reason than saying, "I'm willing to be on that committee, I'm on board with it. Let's see where this goes." [They] were open to some of the challenges I might have been bringing to the field, to what they were doing. That was big.

I think so often, that's just the case that bringing feminism into psychology, or bringing qualitative research into psychology is met with the usual questions of, "Isn't this biased? What about generalizability?" Perhaps I had good enough training to be able to answer those questions on the one hand, but also, nobody got caught up in those questions. I felt I had peers who were interested in my work and I felt like I had support and community. So all of it at the level of horizontal as well as vertical felt quite supported.

I can think about [fewer] things that they did and more ways of being [that made it so] that they weren't particularly hierarchical relationships. I felt very free to say what I wanted to say and have the opinions I wanted to have and be wrong sometimes and be right sometimes, and they were real genuine relationships. Seeing their models, [like] Nancy being involved in Division 35 made me at least want to know what was going on in Division 35.

I don't remember people saying [to] apply for [a certain] grant. There was not so much of that direct stuff, but I think the fact that they were involved in it, and in this case, particularly Nancy, made me feel like I could do that and the fact that I have her support probably makes a difference.

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AR – Tell me a little bit about how you got involved in feminist organizations within psychology, so places like Division 35.

LR – I think AWP (Association for Women in Psychology) was a really important early conference for me as a graduate student. Maybe [even] my first conference as a graduate student. That's such a special place, such a welcoming place for graduate students. [They're] welcoming in that they make sure you can get there, [they are] financially quite supportive.

I remember one year, I must have signed up for the wrong kind of presentation and I ended up doing a structured discussion and Leonore was there and Joan Chrisler was there. You're a first year graduate student, and you're not competent. I [thought], "I can't be leading a structured discussion when these are the discussants." Especially because it was on research that I had thought would be much further along (laughs). Again, [AWP] offered the ability to have real conversations, and it didn't feel so hierarchical and that's one of the things I think is very special about the AWP. Right away you feel like you get to be part of the conversation.

Probably early on, I was more involved with AWP, and then that structured discussion became a lot about third wave feminism. I became very interested in third wave feminism. From that, I actually wrote an article with Carol around third wave feminism, and that was very much out of that structured discussion, that was really meant to be a discussion around body image, and then it became an intergenerational dialogue. We do a lot of that at AWP, intergenerational dialogues. Then, [for] Division 35, I applied for the Hyde Grant. Things like that are important in bringing you into the fold because you think [you] can be part of that community. I got the Hyde Grant and I think that made me feel more connected. That's where Nancy, in terms of now being chair of the reproductive issues committee, helped bring me into the fold. Otherwise it might feel a bit impenetrable. How does one become involved there? So she really, I think, carved the way. I think that either we need to make sure people are doing that, or figure out other ways for it to be more permeable.

AR – I want to ask you about the task force on reproductive issues, but I'm not going to go there yet, because I have so many other things to ask. We started this conversation about mentoring and how you had a very, both wide and deep, experience of support at ASU, and how you learned, it sounds like implicitly, you kind of developed a philosophy of mentoring from your own experiences. But what for you as someone who has now mentored a long line of students yourself, what have been the challenges of mentoring for you as a feminist psychologist? Or just as a psychologist?

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LR – You're right, I can't separate those two. I think I'm still very much in those challenges right now. The first is probably to add to that as an early career feminist psychologist, right? Because I've got that [mentality of], "How am I different from these students? Who am I to be [telling them things?]" At the same time, I'm sort of starting to recognize that I have accumulated a lot of experience, and at least read a lot, if not accumulated a good set of knowledge or ways of asking questions over time, that students can learn from. I don't think that that was automatic, to know that.

I think that it is a challenge as a younger person, as a little person, I think that sort of shapes my experience in ways that are hard to recognize. I think knowing what that line is between non-hierarchical relationships, but also, in some ways I had friendships with my advisors and I have friendships with my students. But also 'boundaries' sounds so ominous, so I don't mean that in a lacking boundaries sort of way. But knowing how to navigate those boundaries [is important], in part because you are sometimes in an authority role and being able to be comfortable with that and also the complexities that come with that. You have some degree of power, really. It does mean the relationship is not completely non-hierarchical. I think this is exacerbated in the particular program that I happen to teach in, in that it's not direct admission to the doctoral program, so we have a masters program and I think it's harder to have genuine relationships with students when they're scared of saying the wrong thing because if they say the wrong thing and I don't want to work with them, they feel [pressure]. That has made doing the kind of feminist mentoring that I'd like to do a little bit more challenging. Then also, [there's] the emotional work about that, because not everybody is going to get in, and also be ok with the fact that people are going to put in time and effort and recognizing that not everybody is an ideal fit. I think dealing with the emotional work of that, of forming relationships with people and knowing that some people will experience disappointment. I think that has been a challenge. That's not something you're prepared well for. I don't know if that was particularly articulate. There's probably a lot more to explain in order to fully get that.

AR – I know. It creates a very particular dynamic, it sounds like. Does it even out at all at the PhD level? Once you know that you're going to be with these folks, does that become a little bit easier?

LR – Yeah. I think it does. It's not perfect, but I think it does become a bit easier and I think students have a bit more freedom and space to develop at that point. On the other hand, I think the challenging part there is that then they're on a very tight schedule in a way that I didn't feel like I was. For some reason, where I am, there's less flexibility. There's actually, I think, a cap on the number of credits they can take. I could just go and take literature classes, and I didn't feel particularly pressed for time as a graduate student, at least until the end. Then I was like, "Now I'm done! (laughs). Now I'm ready to move on." But for a while, there was a time that I really wanted to explore different areas. I think sometimes, just as students get to that place where they want to do that, they also have a hard time getting outside of psychology, which is tough, because I'm at an institution which is actually about interdisciplinarity, but I find there's a little less of it.

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AR – Yeah. It’s a nice word to throw around, but often very hard to put into practice. Now, I realize I haven’t asked you at all about your clinical training and that whole piece of your life. What do you think has been the most important part of that piece for you in terms of clinical training?

LR – That’s actually where I probably had less feminist mentors. Certainly I can read Laura Braun and watch the videos and I certainly have models of power sharing in terms of clinical encounters, but I very much identify as a feminist there, but some of that has been on my own.

AR – Yeah, self-taught. Isn’t that interesting. I went through a clinical program as well and there was nary a mention of feminism ever. Was that similar to your experience?

LR – Yeah. The only times it was mentioned was when I did my presentation (laughs).

AR – That’s right, that’s right!

LR – You know, in your psychotherapy class, you’ve got your one presentation to do, so [I did] feminist psychotherapy. Again, there was an interest and an openness, but I think a limit to where that would go. I think somehow it felt easier to pursue that on your own in terms of research to understand what it meant to do that on your own as a therapist. I have since actually sought out [that sort of thing]. I did training at the Women’s Therapy Center Institute, which is a feminist psychodynamic relational approach to eating problems.

AR – I’ve noticed that you’ve actually written a bit about Women’s Therapy Center, as well. What was the training like? How was that?

LR – That was really interesting. I should also say that my prior training was primarily more cognitive-behaviourally oriented, with bits of Gestalt therapy and emotion focused therapy in the mix. I actually saw [that] as very compatible with my interest in feminist psychology, but coming to New York, you’re in a whole new world, and I was very interested and open to that. So when it came time, after I had completed my postdoc, got my degree, got licensed, thinking about having a small practice and wanting to maintain my clinical skills and have my clinical work inform my research, I didn’t know if I felt ready to do this on my own, and that training just seemed like a great way to continue to be in a conversation around feminist issues to continue to develop.

They have a one year program and a three year program. I think it’s tough to be in an intensive psychotherapy training program when you’re on a tenure track (laughs).

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AR – Oh my! Where did you find the time?

LR – I think what I got most out of it was both being part of that community and the initial exposure to...I shouldn't say initial. It wasn't the first time of being exposed to the idea that a feminist psychodynamic approach [existed]. I had obviously come across that before, but now [I was] thinking about it on the ground, clinically, as opposed to something we talked about for a week in my psychology of women course. I think that was really beneficial, but also, I think more than anything, Laura Kogel was my supervisor and she was very, very...

AR – What's her last name?

LR – Kogel. K-o-g-e-l. She's one of the founders (or if not one of the founders, she's one of the board members) of the Women's Therapy Center Institute and she's very interested in self-psychology and self-states. [She got me] thinking about merging some of that work with thinking about feminist psychology and thinking not just about extending psychodynamic theory around mothering and the culture of mothering, but having a space, really, where we can think about what [it means] to do this kind of work in a feminist way and to be in a community that gets it with regard to when you ask questions about, or struggle with questions around power sharing, diagnosis fees, it's not just assumed. That, on the one hand, I think teaches you to value yourself, because I think that's one of the things that obviously we do as women and I think you do as a new psychologist as well, which is say, "I just want experience and at this point I've been paid almost nothing for so long that I don't value myself."

AR – It's true. It teaches you something about valuing yourself, when you get undervalued for so long.

LR – Exactly! So you start to say, "Can I charge people for what I do? Do I have something to offer?" But [you have to be able to] sit with that, without neglecting concerns about who has access and who doesn't and taking both very seriously. I found that was a space that, whether it was talking about diagnostic issues or whether it was talking about client pay, or whether it was talking about on whose terms we're meeting, all those sorts of issues, [we were able to discuss]. I think when those sorts of questions come up about resistance or about other kinds of things, that's a space where those are taken seriously.

I just went to the Feminist Leadership Institute where Jessica Henderson Daniel talked about this invisible college of feminist psychologists. For example, Norine Johnson, whom I've never met, but somehow, she still has influenced me, and [because of that,] I feel part of that community. So now I feel part of another community that I can tap into, but sometimes it's not about tapping into but just knowing it's out there, that when I think through these clinical issues and think, "Am I crazy, or am I alone in dealing with this issue?" you know that there are other people that you can just ask as a reminder that you're not the first to grapple with these.

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I'm still involved with that group, and also a local [group] called the Women's Mental Health Consortium, which is less explicitly feminist. I think maybe a portion of the folks within it identify as feminist psychologists, but it's a space where psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers who are focused on women's mental health issues really have created a community. We're about three of four hundred people now. It's a real grass roots group and I'm head of the social action committee there. I think it's really helpful for me to be part of a community of feminist minded, if not feminist identified psychologists, clinically, as well as professionally. Of course, then there's the challenge of being in too many communities (laughs) and not having a lot of time.

AR – I know, it seems rich here, though. There's so many interesting things to be a part of.

LR – Yeah. Then there's the New View here in New York. Well, [it's] everywhere, I suppose, but [New York is] a hub of activism. Being in New York is very special. Being at ASU was very special, and being in New York is also very special as far as these issues [go].

AR – Lisa, I'm conscious of the time because I feel like I could take up all of your time, but we have been going for about an hour and I have a million questions that I want to ask. I also want to respect your time because I know you've got a busy day. At this point, there are a couple things more that I want to hear you talk a little bit about. One is some of your more recent research, which spans a number of different areas still, [including] reproductive technology which is, I believe, a more recent project, but also about your work in psycho-oncology. I read a really interesting article that you did with sexual minority women and breast reconstruction. So you're doing a lot, and so I wanted to get you to talk a little bit about your most recent research projects, because I think that's important to be able to hear about what feminist psychologists are doing and how they're doing it. So [can] you say a few words about that? Then maybe I'll leave it to you to decide how you might want to wrap up. I'd like to get you to talk about advice to feminists coming into psychology, but let's get there after. Can you tell us a little bit about your current research projects? Let me just leave it open.

LR – Absolutely. In some ways, perhaps that connects with advice, or at least how I've navigated the field and some of the challenges that people may face at postdoc. Because for feminist psychologists, it becomes a different world, and in academia,

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LR – you've got the world [where] your work has to be funded by NIH (National Institutes of Health), and does NIH, for example, have the same investment in these questions? Maybe to some degree, but [you have to carve] out your space more so.

I had moved to New York for internship. I wanted to be able to stay in the area, North East is sort of back home. My work was always two feet in feminist psychology and then a foot in health psychology (laughs) or an arm.

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AR – You need more feet!

LR – Exactly. It was sort of a game of twister. I think [I was] feeling like maybe it was time to get more traditional training in health psychology and figure out how that merged. Eating disorders was always kind of health psychology and kind of not, and pregnancy as well. So really [any] women's health issues [were sort of health psychology]. I also had done work in arthritis and pain management and was doing work in HIV during my internship. I had applied to postdocs in HIV and in cancer and ended up at Sloan-Kettering doing work in psycho oncology. Through that, [I] had a mentor who was focused on issues of hereditary cancer risk and it was a pretty good match. I also was working with a plastic surgeon. I never imaged that I would be in my feminist body image research, but [they] were very interested in what I had to bring. So [that includes] thinking decision making, about preventative surgeries, for example, for women who had a history of cancer in their family, and some of the other kinds of genetic issues around living with risk and other kinds of things.

I was in the postdoc not all that long before I started the position at the New School. But that was just sort of enough to become really fascinated and immersed in these issues. [I also began to question] how I could do this in a feminist way, because at the end of the day, without asking critical questions such as what assumptions are we making here about women's identity that are not being spoken, about coping, that are being gendered but nobody's saying. It really permeates cancer research, I think. Somehow, I think it becomes harder to say because cancer is still a bit taboo to talk about. Something like breast cancer is threatening to identity, but there's something so taken for granted about the idea that it would be threatening to one's female identity.

I'm certainly not the first person to write about those issues. Whether its Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick or Audre Lorde, [we all talk about] what assumptions are made about gender and breast cancer and reproductive cancer. Through that, I was already very interested in reproductive issues through the work with Nancy, but in a different way. There was a genetic counsellor who was visiting from Israel who was interested in pre-implantation genetic diagnosis. We began talking and [as] part of my postdoc, one of the goals was for you to write an NIH grant, and to think about what would be [appropriate]. Through various discussions, I was a consultant on developing a qualitative study around these issues and I had support from everybody to submit that as a grant just as I was leaving and going to the New School.

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Some of the work I started doing there was around decision making, about breast reconstruction, about focusing on ethnic minority women who are less likely to get breast reconstruction, and understanding [if] that was about access to care, about some of the other body image issues that I had been reading about and writing about or something more complicated. What's going on there? So that was one program of research that I began there and have continued to do and work on. Then [there's] this other piece around reproductive technologies and cancer.

After some back and forth discussion, I would say, about whether this project [would] get submitted to cancer prevention and control, which to me, somehow in ways that probably would take too long to go into, felt like the non-critical way to think about this, versus submitting it to ELSI, which is the Ethical, Legal and Social Implications division of the Human Genome Project. That is sort of what I brought in, what my community at the cancer centre knew was cancer prevention and control, so they wanted to submit this as a grant to that division. I really [wanted] to bring in some feminist mentoring, and bring in, in this case, Rayna Rapp (who does work around feminism and amniocentesis and reproductive issues) as a consultant on this project. I want to be able to ask certain critical questions about this issue without taking for granted that this is something that should be done or shouldn't be done. That gives me space and a community of reviewers that get me where I'm going with this.

That threw me into the world of feminism and genetic testing and reproductive technologies. I was so lucky. I had a reproductive endocrinologist who consulted on that study just to make sure that our educational materials that we developed [were accurate]. [For example], we talked to Broca carriers about their views about screening embryos for the Broca gene. She provided some consultation around some educational materials we gave to people so that they could talk about something that was not completely new to them (because they were dealing with those issues had knowledge of it) but we wanted to make sure. [The consultant] turns out to be this wonderful feminist reproductive endocrinologist who became very interested in those issues and invited me to get involved in some of her work and the work she was doing with a feminist bioethicist around egg donation or egg selling. Depending on where you are, different countries have different policies about that. The States have different policies and issues of anonymity and identity.

I'm still in both worlds, but somehow, they're intersecting to me. [I'm always] thinking about issues of reproductive technologies. I just contributed a chapter to Joan's book on reproductive justice and thinking about [how] they're associated with such elitism, but actually realizing (sometimes you learn so much when you write chapters) that people who are most affected by infertility actually are poor women who may not have access to these technologies. [You have to think] about the social aspect of these technologies, as well as the clinical aspects, and of course those are quite big as well, such as what is enabled by the technologies and what is inhibited by these technologies.

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It's been a great space. I think it's a very rich territory that psychologists are in, again, in pretty much a conventional way. I think it's important, obviously, to think about connections between stress and infertility, but again, I think it's more within anthropology or sociology that we have people asking those critical questions about similar questions we asked about anorexia and about the "epidemic." Is there a real epidemic with infertility issues and medicalization, issues of access to care? All of those things [are considered], and as these technologies really take off they become quite contentious in the ways in which they overlap with stem cells and creation of embryos and therefore have complications for reproductive choice.

I'm in the right places somehow, and again, you find the right people that are able to ask the same foundational questions about resistance still within that work, but in new areas and new venues. So as I grow, hopefully the work grows.

AR – Would you have any advice to women or men coming into psychology at this point who want to pursue a career in which they can be acting on their feminist values [and] can be asking critical questions like you've done? Any advice to folks coming into the discipline now?

LR – Like I said, I feel both lucky with mentorship, and I also feel that to say that something is just luck puts it out there and there's no agency. I think that finding the right program, the right mentors who value this work, obviously [is important]. It's no fun to do work that [you don't like]. Sometimes there can be something a little energizing about going against the grain, but you just want that right balance of enough reason to give you a bit of an edge, and at the same time, people who are going to support your work and encourage your work. Now, this is the time that that exists, but it doesn't exist everywhere. [You have to] find people whose work matches. There's great diversity among feminist psychologists so [you need] the right mentor for your questions, your approach, but also the right space where you can grow.

Maybe that's cliché, but I do see that the process of, especially clinical psychology (that's the world that I'm in), admissions is so selective that I think students sometimes feel like they have to put that aside and [think that] what's most important is just getting in because it's so competitive to get in. I guess in the worst case, if the mentors are not in your program, it's good to know that you can find them elsewhere in that invisible college of feminist psychology where people are quite open to people reaching out. Maybe [my advice would be] not to feel so much that first and foremost I have to get into a program. If it's not the right program, [it won't be the best fit]. Again, I worry it sounds a little cliché, but following passion, but also being open [is important]. I guess that's something that I think that (and this may be idiosyncratic to my work) there's been so many special happenstances that you think maybe you'll try [something else] and maintain this core thread of your work and bringing it to different areas, I think personally, makes it more exciting. I think sometimes reaching out to the sociologists and anthropologists [enriches the work]. Just be open to expanding the work. I think that's what will keep feminist psychology, in some ways, alive. Sometimes I think, "Am I just a feminist sociologist?" (laughs). On the one hand I think maintaining feminist psychology

is so deeply influenced by other feminist movements within academia and outside of academia, and at the same time, maintaining that there is a space for psychological issues within this as well.

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AR – Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would really like to contribute to the interview and to have on tape?

LR – I think I've said a lot.

AR – There's a lot I haven't asked you, too, and we could do, like, ten interviews (laughs).

LR – If I think of something, I'll add it.

AR – Okay. Maybe I'll just ask one last question. Has being a feminist in psychology posed any obstacles to you? We've talked a lot about the very positive ways in which it's influenced all of what you do. Have you ever felt that it's been an obstacle?

LR – Yes. I can't imagine being a psychologist in any other way. I wouldn't be a psychologist if I wasn't a feminist psychologist, so it's not an obstacle in an 'I wish it weren't the case' kind of thing. The best I can articulate it, perhaps, is the topic of micro aggressions. There are micro aggressions against feminism and feminist psychology. I think that one of the downsides, in some ways, of having so much wonderful positive feminist mentoring is that you think the world has changed (laughs). Somehow you're still invested in changing it. I mean, you think the world of academia has changed, because obviously there's much that still needs to change. So without naming names, I think feedback I've gotten along the way is vague feedback, like, "Maybe for the next few years you need to act a little more like a man," "Maybe don't publish in journals that have titles with women in it," "Don't use the word breast so much in your work on breast cancer."

AR – How can you avoid that? (laughs).

LR – "You're too nice." Maybe that's not a feminist issue, but to some degree, I think it is. The 'try to be more like a man' had many meanings in that case. I spent many evenings trying to unravel [that]. That partly was a message about doing more quantitative research, but quantitative research about not being so nice to students, not being so supportive, as well as possibly the ways in which one takes up space and has voice at meetings or not...lots of complicated meanings embedded within that.

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I think you're less likely at this moment (not to say it doesn't happen) to experience direct work, but more, I think, a dismissing of your scholarship sometime. I think

maintaining the sense that I'm doing something important and knowing that. Sometimes that can be a challenge. You can sometimes move towards buying into maybe being too specialized, maybe it's not addressing directly trying to solve poverty right now, so am I making a large enough contribution to the world? I think remembering that that's in and of itself a feminist issue and again, sort of reminding and going back in your mind at least to that invisible college. It's such a useful terminology to remember what this means. I think it doesn't come up so much directly, but I think more indirectly in feedback you get. Maybe tone down the feminism kind of comments.

AR – One last question. What's the best thing about being a feminist psychologist for you?

LR – I think that teaching, for example right now, psychology of women [is the best]. I'm teaching non-traditional students in this case, which are a little bit older than a traditional college student. There are things I can read and still be re-inspired by, but you don't have always that same [feeling of] coming across something for the first time and having your world turned upside down. Getting to experience that through students' experiences really kind of keeps it alive for me and is very special. It helps me think [that] there are going to be people out there in various ways (some are going to be in psychology and some are going to be in film and some are going to be in other places) that are leaving, whether it's in our mentoring relationship or whether it's in a classroom environment, asking different questions. [They're] starting to say, "What assumptions are being made here? What's being taken for granted here?" Seeing that transformation, I think, is very, very special.

I think the community of feminist psychologists is very special. They're mentors but friends. I feel very much a part of something. I think some of my peers in other areas have that, and it's interesting, even in my lab space I think my students have created that as well. I think actually in your case, from what I understand, that's the case too. I think there is something about, perhaps, what you aspire for, people pick up on and create as well and it pays it forward in whatever way and that trickles down.

AR – Great. Why don't we stop there.

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