Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with H. Lorraine Radtke

Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
June 19, 2007

When citing this interview, please use the following citation:

Rutherford, A. (2007, June 19). Interview by A. Rutherford [Video Recording]. Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

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

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

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with H. Lorraine Radtke
Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
June 19, 2007

LR – H. Lorraine Radtke, Interview Participant

AR – Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

LR – So my full name is Hazel Lorraine Radtke and I was born in Calgary, Alberta, in Canada, December 8th, 1952.

AR – Okay great. Well let me start by asking you to tell me about the evolution of your feminist identity. Tell me about how that all sort of came about, that you became a feminist.

LR – Not an easy question.

AR – Okay.

LR - I guess in my case it was a very gradual process. I, of course, was an undergraduate student in the early 70s, when the second wave of the feminist movement was quite strong. However in Calgary I would say, as an undergraduate student, I was not involved in the feminist movement, although I think I always had a kind of independent streak in a way. I should explain that I was the first in my family to go to university and I was encouraged to go to university, especially by my mother, and I think I was very influenced by the stories of her life. She had many stories about experiences where she was not allowed to do certain things because she was a woman, or because she was a married woman, and so on. And so I think I had grown up with those stories and so I was very resistant, without being a feminist or having a feminist identity, I was very resistant to the idea that I should do particular kinds of things because I was a girl or because I was a woman. So I think in some way that's one reason why I was attracted to psychology as a discipline. I was interested in the content, but also, I saw it as a science and a departure from things like education and nursing, where probably the bulk of my high school female graduating class would have gone post graduation.

AR – Right.

LR – So in a sense, I think the seeds are there.

AR – Yeah.

LR – As a graduate student as well, the research I did was not at all feminist related, and in fact when I went to graduate school my intention was to pursue cognitive psychology.

{3:08}

AR – Oh okay.

LR – Which certainly was very mainstream. At that time of course it was kind of the new exciting sub-discipline replacing verbal learning, etcetera, and through various circumstances, although I started working with a supervisor whose speciality was bilingual memory, I ended up shifting to another supervisor who worked on experimental hypnosis. And I worked on hypnotic amnesia which involved exploring ostensibly memory processes, however through the hypnosis research, I was introduced more to social psychology as well.

AR – Oh okay, sure. And this was at Carleton right?

LR – I was at Carleton, that's right. And one thing that was unique about Carleton at the time was that I think it was the only history [of psychology] graduate program in the country. Of course I had not gone there because of that, but as a consequence I took a history [of psychology] course as a – I was a real student in the sense that I was interested in a lot of things. So even though I was interested in cognitive psychology and hypnosis, I did take a history course. And in fact my graduate supervisor was also interested in history and wrote a number of pieces on the history of hypnosis.

AR – And who was your supervisor?

LR – Nicholas Spanos, yeah he was interested in the Salem witchcraft business and some other historical moments. So I took a history course, and actually it was through the history course that I met Ian Lubek and Erica Apfelbaum.

AR – Neat.

LR – And also at Carleton, Fran Cherry came along when I was in the first year of my doctoral program, and so I took a course with her on aggression. But of course she was a very strong feminist and we talked about many topics related to gender and women and I wrote a paper for that course on the distinction between aggression and assertiveness in women. So it got me reading the literature on the social psychology of aggression and gender. And at that time the notable finding was that even when women behaved in assertive ways, or the same ways as assertive men behaved, they were labelled aggressive. And so there was lots of questioning of this whole notion of empowerment through assertiveness training, and so on and so forth.

AR – Right.

{6:10}
LR – So my paper was on that debate. Not a fantastic paper by any means, certainly a student project, but it introduced me to some of the literature that I had not read before. And actually for a long time I think I was interested in the world of women through literature as well.

AR – Okay.

LR – I read Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, both their, eventually both their feminist writings as well as their fiction.

AR – Right, right.

LR – So by the time I finished graduate school I would say that I was sort of ready in a way to become a feminist. And in my first year of teaching, I had a one year appointment at the University of Manitoba, and there I met both graduate students and a couple of faculty members who were feminist-oriented, and had various conversations and whatnot. But it really wasn't I guess – and so I think gradually I came to identify myself as feminist and read more and more feminist work.

AR – Yeah.

LR – And I guess it was a gradual transition once I was at the University of Calgary.

AR – Okay.

LR – I started out continuing my work on experimental hypnosis, writing grants and doing research, and became gradually dissatisfied and not very motivated to continue that work, and became more and more interested in feminist critique of science.

AR – Okay. So was that dissatisfaction with the work you were doing a result of, or a by-product of your increasing interest in feminist critiques, or…

LR – Yeah, I think. And also partly, well I mean, I know the work in experimental hypnosis probably doesn't sound very critical, but in fact, I guess what was unique about working with Nick Spanos and his take on hypnosis was that it was a very critical perspective.

AR – Okay.

{8:27}

LR – Although it was a kind of cognitive approach, he had also trained as, his PhD was in sociology, and so he had read people like [Alfred] Schütz and [Harold] Garfinkel, and there was a certain flavour in his theorizing that was social psychological, but in a sociological point of view. So this whole idea of believed in imaginings and being able to kind of construct realities was embedded in his theorizing about hypnosis. And the field at that time was a lot more interesting and active than it is today. There were very sharp theoretical divides between those who took a view of hypnosis as a state of consciousness, an altered state of consciousness, and those who took either a kind of more behavioural or cognitive approach. So as a graduate student I was immersed in this kind of theoretical debate, and I think adopted a very kind of critical mindset to "the mainstream" [motions quotations]. In that world "the mainstream" was the altered state of consciousness group, but that whole approach and way of thinking I think then carries over as you move into new areas. And interestingly enough, my teaching in the early days was largely statistics. My teaching position at the University of Manitoba was to

teach graduate statistics, although I did teach a section of introductory psychology as well. And similarly at the University of Calgary, when I started I was teaching all statistics and research methods.

AR – Wow.

LR – So I think, you know, you're reading feminist critique of science, you're being exposed to feminist theorizing, I think in a way you can't help but start to think about what you're doing in your research.

AR – Yeah. So what impact then did that have on your research trajectory? How did you manage to take the feminist critiques that you're reading and start to have that kind of filter down into what you were doing in your own research?

LR – Well, I guess there were sort of two transitional phases I think. Well I mean one was just sort of feeling that the experimental hypnosis work really wasn't very productive. I think I felt that I had gone as far with it as I could and I began to feel as though I was just kind of producing experiments for the sake of producing experiments; you have graduate students, or you have funding from granting agencies, and so you do this research and you try to publish it, and so on. But there were I guess two projects that were kind of a transition phase for me. I had a SSHRC grant with a colleague to do a project on ways of knowing; you may know the book by Belenky et al. on women's ways of knowing. This colleague of mine had come to the University of Calgary a few years after I arrived there, and he was interested in cognitive development, and interested particularly in moral reasoning, not so much a la Kohlberg, but some of the ideas that came after. So we had written this grant together and did a project on women's ways of knowing.

AR – Okay.

{12:25}
LR – Now when we started out the project, we started it out very much within that kind of developmental framework that, you know, Belenky et al. did a similar thing, a similar theoretical move as Gilligan had made

AR – Right.

LR – Which was to take Perry's work and to say, well this is a model that is shaped from research with young men and boys, let's see if we can do a similar kind of thing with young women. But it was still kind of within a tradition of this idea of cognitive development, and trying to develop a kind of theory of transition and development in modes of cognitive thinking over time. And I think they got themselves into some of the similar kinds of debates that Gilligan got into with regard to moral reasoning.

AR – Right.

LR – So we started the project in that vein. We only really published one paper on it, but in fact the paper that we published was one that, where I did more of a discursive analysis.

AR – Ah.

LR – It was a shame in a way because we had all this data that we were collecting, but it was this very standardized kind of interview, and as we were analyzing the data and trying to code these different stages of cognitive thinking, I became quite, I guess, critical of that whole approach and found that the whole coding process, I felt like we were imposing a kind of structure that was not convincingly there in my opinion.

AR – Okay.

LR – And all along I had been reading all kinds of critiques of conventional psychology and treatments about qualitative methods like discourse analysis, so eventually I did a kind of discursive analysis of some of the interview material. And then the other thing that I did was a project with an undergraduate student. It took awhile to publish it actually, but it was the study of the obituaries of psychologists published in the *American Psychologist*.

AR – I've used that one a little bit.

LR – Yeah. It was my first attempt at discourse analysis and it was difficult material to work with actually because it is so, well it's a genre basically and sort of stylized in a way. Well the obituaries at that time at any rate were not as stylized as they are today. Some of them were quite lengthy and there's certainly lots of interesting material there to work with. So that was kind of my transition point and I really never looked back since then I guess, in terms of doing research that is feminist-oriented, typically more qualitative-oriented, although the project that I'm involved in now on intimate partner violence is a kind of combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

{16:03}

AR – Well I was going to ask at that point that you're talking about though, that transition point, did you have sort of any, what was your kind of attitude towards statistics? I mean was it a sense of just here's another thing I could be doing, or was there, discourse analysis represents another method that I could use and I'll continue to do statistical work, or what was that relationship?

LR – Well no it was part and parcel of a kind of rejection of conventional psychology, because as you probably know from looking at a few things that I've published, the approach that I took up was the [Jonathan] Potter and [Margaret] Wetherell approach from the Loughborough Group. You know they published their book in 1987 and you know it involves a kind of rethinking of what psychology can be. And I guess the irony is that I never saw myself becoming a social psychologist, but in the end I am, well, my experimental social psychology colleagues wouldn't recognize me as a social psychologist, but in fact those are my interests; they're much more social psychological. So I was very influenced by their rethinking about what social psychology could look like, how we might think about attitudes in a different way and the self in a different way, and so on and so forth. So it wasn't just a move to another method, but it was a kind of rethinking of psychology. And I'm sure, although it's very difficult to make the connections

now, I think in hindsight I'm sure some of the change had to [do] be with the kind of context that I was living in.

AR – Right.

LR - As a young woman graduating with a PhD, almost to my surprise I suppose, because I didn't grow up thinking I would ever go to university, never mind thinking that I would get a PhD. And it's not that I had a hard life or was disadvantaged in some particular way, but my family, well my mother didn't have the opportunity to get as much education as she would have liked, and my father didn't have the opportunity, so they encouraged me but it wasn't, I didn't come from a solidly middle class, well-educated family. So here I was graduating as a young woman and finding myself thankfully employed, but you know, in a discipline that I was very interested in, but it was heavily male-dominated. And of course one of the twists for me was ending up getting a job in the department where I had studied as an undergraduate student, which was not by design, but again there were not a huge number of jobs at that time. So I was very fortunate to find a job in that department, and also it worked out well for my partner as well, which I would say was also a consideration at that time.

AR – Yeah.

{19:20}

LR – There was not a lot of support for hiring couples. Today I think couples still face a challenge in terms of finding suitable employment together. So some of it had to do too where, you know, you've got this education, you feel like you know what you're doing, and then here you are entering into a work setting where you are the most junior in terms of this hierarchy of professorship, assistant, associate, full; and also younger. And at the time that I was entering the department there wasn't a lot of hiring going on. It was sort of right at the beginning of the major, the long sort of period of, prolonged period, of budget cuts.

AR – Right.

LR – So there were a lot of, I think the department was virtually all full professors, a few associates, and very few assistant professors. And then there was quite a gap between myself and when more assistant professors were hired. So I didn't really have a cohort in my department, other than my partner and a couple of other people.

AR – Okay.

LR – So as a woman then sort of thrust into this very male world, and also a world where I had taken courses from many of these people before, it provides a kind of interesting environment I guess, or interesting context. And I was also very fortunate I think at the university to meet a number of very wonderful women.

AR – Okay.

LR – There were two women in my department who were quite senior, but they were very nice to me. And I met some very strong feminist women; Eli [Eliane] Silverman in Women's Studies, and Marsha Hanen, who became a dean of general studies, and who actually was the person who encouraged me to propose a course in psychology related to gender.

AR – Wow. How did that go over within the department?

{21:50}

LR – Well that was interesting because you know I had not really thought of doing this, and she actually proposed it to me. I mean that's how green I was right (laughs). I'm very indebted to her for doing that actually. So what I proposed was a course on the psychology of gender differences, which is kind of embarrassing from the point of view of today; it's not of course. But in hindsight, strategically, it was a good move because I didn't really think it would be controversial, but in fact it was when it came forward in the department for discussion. And of course here I am, untenured, very junior person, but wisely I had a letter of support from the Dean of General Studies who argued that this would be important and that they – General Studies was the home of the Women's Studies program – so argued that this course would be important for that program, etcetera, etcetera. So making a case basically for the demand for the course and so on, if not within psychology, then certainly more broadly within the university. And so yeah, there was quite a bit of debate about it. The concern seemed to be that really the focus ought to be individual differences, and not gender differences, and going to gender differences was seen as I guess narrowing the focus too much. But I mean the course was approved and eventually I changed the title to psychology of gender, arguing that the gender differences perspective was old fashioned and that the field had moved along and so on and so forth.

AR – And how did that go over?

LR – Oh that was really not a problem.

AR – Yeah. What has your relationship with Women's Studies been over the years at Calgary?

LR – Well it's not a really close relationship and some of that I think is just the institution as well. Eli [Eliane] Silverman was the director of the program when I was hired, and for many years after, she's now retired, but she was really the only Women's Studies person. And everyone else who's contributed courses from the different programs, but it wasn't really, it wasn't like we all belonged to Women's Studies and sort of had a little sub-department or something like that. So maybe this is my own fault too, I don't know, but it's really not a kind of close connection, although I certainly know the women that teach, the new faculty, there are two people that teach in Women's Studies now. And of course over the years I have known some of the people who have taught on a sessional basis there.

AR – Have people in psychology, other than yourself, been involved at all in Women's Studies courses?

LR – Not that I know of. There are certainly I would say women in my department who are sympathetic. I don't know how many women in my department would call themselves feminist.

AR – Any sense of why the reluctance? I mean this is a topic that comes up all the time.

LR – No, I don't know. I was talking to a young woman at the conference today Eri Park, I don't know if you know her.

AR – No.

{25:40}

LR – She's very clear and direct about her feminism, and so I was kind of complimenting her on that, and you know kind of thinking how over the years you just get kind of worn down. I can remember as a young faculty member sometimes taking my senior colleagues to task for things that they would say or do, and I don't think it made me particularly popular (laughs).

AR – Do you remember any examples? Do you remember any of those times when you took someone to task?

LR – Not really. Nothing explicit comes to mind, but I guess sometimes comments would be made and so on and so forth. You know, just to show my age, I remember going to discussions, well basically symposia, dealing with topics like using gender inclusive language, and these would be fierce debates where you would have people seriously and valiantly defending the right to use "he" and arguing that gender inclusive language was nonsense and was a distortion of the English language, and so on and so forth. So there were lots of comments made that were not particularly kind to women and so I suspect that when I heard certain jokes and whatnot I would perhaps comment from time to time. I think the advantage of being young is that sometimes people just say "Oh well, she'll learn"

AR – She'll learn.

LR – And you do, I mean you have to get along with your colleagues in some ways, but then times have changed as well.

AR – Yeah.

LR – Certainly the conversations that go on in department meetings and so on and so forth have a much different tone than they did when I was first (inaudible- 27:44)

AR – Although I've had conversations with women hired around the same time I was, and some more senior women, in which we were talking about feminism, and I find that women in my cohort are adamantly not feminist because they don't need to be. And I get very worked up about that, but it's interesting. So at department meetings and so on that wouldn't even be, stuff like that probably wouldn't even be challenged.

LR – I think because of the age difference, and also the seniority difference, I've tended to avoid those conversations feeling that it wasn't my place. I mean I think they all know where I stand, and feeling well, I'm here, and I do try to support my female colleagues in various ways, but I've, and maybe I'm being cowardly, I don't know, but I've sort of felt that it's not my place to kind of force it on them.

{27:47}

AR – Oh I don't take it on, I just note it.

LR – Yeah, and I think because my own evolution was, you know you realize that you kind of have to have I guess critical events in your life or certain circumstances all come together. You never know, right, who is going to decide one day that feminism is useful to them after all.

AR – Yeah, it's true.

LR – And it is a different world in which they live. And sometimes I get the feeling that when you sort of talk about your own experiences, or you try to interpret their lives in light of your own experience, the reaction is sort of the kind of reaction that we would have had to our own mothers. Like 'oh god, that's not what my life is like.' So yeah, I've never asked.

AR – Well tell me a little bit about, it strikes me from looking at your CV, and this is a guess and you can verify whether this is the case, but it looks like you've mentored a lot of students over the years. Is that, in terms of doing conference papers with them and sort of working with them on projects and having publications with them, both undergraduate and graduate, would that be an accurate statement?

LR – Well I don't know if it's a lot. I mean if you probably compare my CV to other people you might find that it's not that many compared to what some people do. But I do tend to work closely, collaboratively, with my students.

AR – Do you have a particular sort of mentoring philosophy that you employ?

LR – Not really, or it's not explicit or conscious in some kind of way. I guess it's sort of an intuitive approach and I think having a feminist perspective does set you up for being concerned about certain kinds of issues; making sure that it's an agreeable and collaborative relationship, and not wanting to take advantage of students, and wanting to nurture their strengths and help them overcome their weaknesses, and all of that. And I guess the collaborative working style.

AR – I was talking with another feminist psychologist whom I was interviewing and she said, you know, in some ways feminist therapy is a victim of its own success because now what we take as good practice in any therapy was originally a feminist principle; the idea of paying attention to power and working more collaboratively, and so on. In some ways good mentoring strikes me as somewhat being basically feminist in a way, it's almost, I don't know, it's kind of an aside.

{31:57}
LR – Yeah, and I mean I've worked almost exclusively with women so I mean that's another thing I guess, I mean it's self-selected. I mean obviously they're coming to me because they want to work with me in terms of the research area and so on and so forth. But obviously that means that I guess I have a kind of sense of what they face, and anticipating the kinds of things that they need to prepare themselves for in the future and so on.

AR – Yeah. Well tell me a little bit about, you've alluded to the difficulty of finding jobs in the same place for both your partner and yourself. Tell me a little bit more about as a woman in psychology, and having a family I take it, at least one child?

LR – Two.

AR – Two children. How has it been for you to balance the professional and the personal? Family life and career.

LR – How long do you have? (laughs). Well, yeah, I mean, I don't know. Of course I've read all of the literature, or a lot of the literature, so I'm well aware of the challenge. Well I think there have definitely been advantages. I think this is one of the things that academic women – and maybe one reason why some of our colleagues aren't feminist – that in a way it's easier, it's much easier for us to do that kind of balance, because we have the economic resources to get assistance and because we have more flexibility in the work that we do. And there are advantages and disadvantages of having a partner who is in academia as well, but I would say that the advantage is that the partner also has the resources and flexibility. So that I think was a tremendous advantage. Again, when I first came to the University of Calgary, I met faculty who were not that much older than I was, who had children, who had no maternity leave; who literally gave birth, took a few weeks off, if they were lucky they had a baby in the summer and didn't have to get back into the classroom right away, and somehow they managed. I'm not sure how. So I was of the generation where maternity leave was finally there. I think I experienced some anxiety when I had to first explain to the department head that I was pregnant and going to be needing maternity leave, and therefore was going to have to be relieved of teaching for a particular term. But I think because it was kind of new and because it was unclear what sort of impact that would have then on my career and how I was evaluated, and so on and so forth.

AR – Yeah.

{35:25}

LR - And now of course it's very well established, and what's more, I have colleagues today who have taken as much as a year of maternity leave. I know that it's not all paid at the same level but they now have that opportunity to do that, and have done that, which strikes me as quite remarkable in some ways. So there are all those benefits that make, in hindsight at least, made it much easier. I think when you're in the thick of it sometimes it feels a little bit more stressful and difficult, but looking at it from the exit end shall we say, now that the younger one is 18, I would say that to be a parent or a mother as an academic is relatively easy compared to the kinds of juggling that some women have to do. Now that said, again it's hard; it's just like cases of

discrimination, when you look at the individual case. Can I say that my academic record would be better if I didn't have children or had mothered in a different way or balanced in a different way? Maybe yes, maybe no. It obviously meant that I was spending a significant amount of time doing certain other things besides my academic work.

AR – Did your career play a role in decision-making around when to have children for you?

LR – Yes and no. I mean I think it was helpful that I had an academic job, a tenure-track position. I actually had my first son before I had tenure, which in hindsight was pretty brave (laughs).

AR – Yeah, yeah.

LR – But I think we were still at the time in history of the universities in Canada when my publication record coming in was probably stronger than some of my more senior colleagues or full professors. So because of the generational thing and the shifting expectations and the moment in which they were hired, and so on and so forth. So it was fine.

AR – So you had a bit of a buffer in a way.

LR – But it was more the approaching 30 business and the whole medical discourse about not wanting to have babies when you're too old and being at risk for birth defects or difficult deliveries, and so on and so forth. So it was more my age, but that said, I have to acknowledge that I was fairly well set up in terms of having a job, having a partner who had a job, and all of that.

AR – Right, yeah. Interesting that you say approaching 30 and it becoming a concern because now I think that's almost shifted a decade. I think a lot of people I talk to, academic women and others, say it's when you approach 40 you realize that gosh, you better get going!

LR – Well yeah, if you haven't done it by then.

AR – In another interview that I was just reading over, another feminist psychologist was saying that she had her first child when she was around 30 and her obstetrician, or the person who delivered her baby who wasn't her usual doctor, said something about how dangerous it was that she was having this baby at 30, and I'm like wow. My cohort of friends, we all went to college together, are now approaching 40 and just starting to have their babies. So it's interesting to see a bit of a shift anyway.

LR – Yeah.

AR – Tell me, you've been working in the area of gender and feminism in psychology for a number of years. What would you say, in your estimation, what would you say feminist psychology first of all has accomplished, vis à vis mainstream psychology perhaps, and what do you think it hasn't been able to accomplish?

LR – Well I mean in some ways feminist psychology has established its own kind of mainstream, right? I mean you have journals like the *Psychology of Women Quarterly* that are very successful, and a very strong division in APA [American Psychological Association], very strong section I would say at CPA [Canadian Psychological Association], and certainly, if not in clinical psychology programs, at least in counselling psychology programs, I think the feminist voice has become fairly strong there. So in the practice of psychology there is a very strong feminist influence. And I mean certain things have become mainstream right? Like Gilligan's work appears in all kinds of textbooks for example. You know we may not like how it's represented necessarily, but it's there. And there are psychology of gender, psychology of women, courses taught in many places. So it certainly has made some difference I would say.

AR – Right, right. What do you think remains to be done in terms of, what do you think feminism can still bring to psychology that it might not have?

LR – Well it's still very marginal, isn't it? Like I am the only, as far as I know, I am the only kind of explicitly identified feminist in the department, and it's not something that's advertised on the webpage, not that I would expect it to be necessarily. I think that's the case in many places, so I'm not trying to fault my department any more than any other, but no one looks for a feminist psychologist when they're trying to hire someone. And even courses in gender and women's studies I would say tend to be kind of marginalized. So where we end up is often like the kind of evolution I've gone through right, where you start out as one thing and you evolve into something else. The wonderful thing about academic freedom right?

AR – Yeah.

{43:05}

LR – So yeah, I mean I think there's plenty to be done. I guess the most powerful thing for me probably was the feminist critique of science. Now that doesn't come exclusively from within psychology of course, but from feminism more broadly. And I think the other thing besides that would be kind of the inter-disciplinarity that comes with a kind of feminist perspective, where you're reading some philosophy, some social science of various kinds. You know, I would read people like Ruth Bleier and Anne Fausto-Sterling, scientists writing about science, and so on and so forth.

AR – Yeah there are many different strands of feminist psychology, but one of the things that I'm really interested in is to what extent has psychology been receptive to feminist critique. Obviously the evolution of feminist psychology itself was influenced by a feminist critique, but there are even people who critique feminist psychology for not having delivered on the transformative potential that at least at one time it may have offered. What's your sense of that?

LR – Well I mean that's a difficult issue isn't it because, well it's political, but it also potentially has an impact on individual lives; you know, how far do you stick your neck out? And so I think if you're an isolated feminist in a department, you don't have the so-called critical mass to promote change. Now I mean we do have organizations that support change broadly. I think feminists have had an impact on some APA policies and also at the CPA level, in terms of ethics,

and in terms of gender equity on committees, and things like that. So in those kinds of institutions where you do have a critical mass of women who can kind of mobilize, you can make that kind of change. But the university is a different matter, so I think it's more than psychology really. Personally I would argue that, or at least what I see is a kind of backsliding away from feminist activism, not necessarily on the part of feminist women, but the institutional support that was once there is kind of eroding. So for example gender equity policies – all universities have gender equity policies, but the question is how much teeth do those policies have in the sense that, is the dean telling department heads you've got to follow this policy, or how come you only have short-listed men, or how come when psychology is 80% female are you not hiring more women in your department, etcetera, etcetera. Those kinds of initiatives I think I see less and less of.

AR – Any sense of why that might be happening, from your perspective?

LR – Well I guess it's maybe part of the whole cultural shifts, again it's hard to see it isn't it? You don't have the benefit of hindsight yet; you're kind of looking at these broad movements. Universities as a whole tend to be kind of liberal institutions, and just as many young women today think we don't need feminism, we're equal, nobody's blocking us from getting an education, if we want to study engineering we're welcomed with open arms, etcetera, etcetera, those kinds of views I think are also held by senior administration in many institutions. {47:45}

AR – Yeah, yeah. Well you, it strikes me from looking at your CV that you have served in various administrative capacities at the University of Calgary over the years. Decanal level and so on. Tell me a little bit about what it's been like to be a woman in administration and how that sort of played out for you.

LR – Well my first administrative appointment was as an assistant dean in student affairs. So that was actually a kind of good initiation because, well student affairs you're dealing with students right, it's kind of like being a counsellor. So on the one hand it's a very practical job, on the other hand it's not that visible. But I mean it was interesting, that was an interesting experience for me, sort of showing some of the complexities and contradictions of life. I was the assistant to the associate dean who was a man, who really was a great mentor for me in terms of that kind of work and helped me gain an appreciation of all these rules and regulations that you have to have at your fingertips, how things worked. Was very encouraging, even though I was ostensibly his assistant, he basically sort of trained me to [take on] become his position, and eventually I did. He was planning to retire and eventually I did take on the associate dean position. But he was very very good to me, and he was certainly not a feminist I would say. In fact he was an economist, so our disciplines were very different, but you know he was really encouraging. I mean I would hate to say father figure because we weren't close in that way, but a very good mentor relationship in terms of that kind of job. I learned a huge amount from him in terms of how things worked and insight into how the male administrators in those kinds of positions thought about things.

AR – Yeah, interesting.

LR – Yeah, and then by the time I became associate dean I had a certain amount of experience; so I had, I guess, some confidence. And student affairs I think is a fairly easy kind of administrative position to slide into because there tend to be more women working in that field and especially the people who do most of the academic advising and things like that tend to be largely women. So it's a fairly easy position to work in. The program side was sometimes more challenging.

AR – Okay.

LR – It's intimidating, especially as a young woman, to walk into a room for a meeting where everyone else is an older man. It is intimidating, I'll grant you that, and it takes a certain courage and persistence. And then eventually you have enough experience that you can feel that you can contribute equally. And you know I've had the experience that you sometimes read about in the literature where you say something and it's like you don't exist. But then on the other hand I also had very many positive experiences as well, where I was taken seriously and listened to and felt that I was treated as an equal.

{51:51}

AR – Right, right. Well let me switch gears a little bit and ask you to tell me more about your more recent research. I noted that, well at this conference you're talking about theorizing motherhood, but you've also, and maybe these are related, you are working on a couple of large projects, it looks like on intimate partner violence. Tell me about how that has come into being?

LR – That was just, well I mean, I don't know, am I being a woman by saying it was just chance? (laughs). But it was in a way. Well I mean it's kind of ironic in a sense because I had been feeling that I wanted to do something a bit more practical. Maybe perhaps when you spend your time doing more theoretical work, or discourse analysis, you think oh, I would really like to kind of do something in the community. And literally one day out of the blue I had a phone call from a sociologist at the University of Manitoba, Jane Ursel, who was telling me about this project and that she was looking for people at the University of Calgary who might be interested in collaborating, and they particularly wanted some psychologists to contribute because there was a mothering component and they were trying to put together an interdisciplinary team. And someone had suggested my name, I'm not sure who. So she was inviting me to come to a kind of team meeting. She had gotten some seed money from SSHRC, this CURA program I think offered seed money if you were trying to set a team up to develop a proposal. So I went to Winnipeg with this very large number of women – it's a tri-provincial study; it involves Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Alberta, and it's a community-academic partnership. So there were academics there like me, there were women working in the community, working with domestic violence. The majority of them were executive directors of shelters and that sort of thing. There were women there who are well-known experts in the field, like Leslie Tutty, who is my colleague in the faculty of social work, and there were people like myself who had related interests; psychology of gender, I had done a little bit of research related to violence against women, interested in mothering, which was one of the focuses of this project. So there was a discussion and after that some people fell away, some people said yes I'll continue, and again to my surprise, as a proposal was getting finalized Jane called me and asked me if I would be

willing to be the provincial coordinator, whereupon I took a deep breath because I felt like I was kind of the new kid on the block; not exactly an expert in this field. But she was again drawing on my administrative experience and thinking that that would be useful in terms of coordinating all of this. And I guess it was a time in my life when I sort of thought, well I'll jump in with two feet, and I did. And it's been a lot of work, but again I think as a more senior academic I can afford to take the risk. This idea intrigued me, of working in a partnership, in a collaboration, with women in the community who have certain educational credentials, but they're not academics and their constituency is the women that they serve. But also an interdisciplinary research team, and it's been a very interesting research experience so far.

{56:21}

AR – Can you talk a little bit more about what that's been like to work both in an interdisciplinary capacity or multidisciplinary capacity and working in partnership with community.

LR – Well one of the challenges that we faced in Alberta was that many of us did not know each other, and especially myself. I didn't know, I mean I knew Leslie Tutty and some of the other academics, but only in a very casual kind of way. So we had quite a long process of kind of building trust. The community team members are very protective of the women that they serve and wanted to ensure that the research that we were doing was relevant to the interests of the women and would contribute something of value. Their concerns of course are to make sure that there is good policy related to intimate partner violence, that they are adequately funded, and so on. So they would see this research as hopefully contributing to that kind of end. So there were lots of negotiations and trying to sort of build a kind of relationship, a whole set of relationships, and across distance too, because we have four different research sites: Lethbridge, Calgary, Edmonton, and Peace River. So we're having to span those geographical distances and build relationships. Now we started in 2004 and we've made it this far. We did lose some team members early on, all academics interestingly enough, who I think felt, well obviously the other thing with a project like this is that you have to be somewhat flexible in terms of your own research agenda, to work with such a large research team. And as I mentioned at the beginning, it's a kind of combination of more sort of conventional approaches to gathering data and qualitative approaches. So there were obviously differences of opinion about how to design the study, what was important, etcetera, etcetera. So we did lose three of our academic members fairly early on, and it was a bit traumatic at that point, but we recovered and have carried on ever since.

AR – Wow.

LR – But I quite like it because it's an amazing group of women, just amazing.

AR – Wow that does sound, I'm in awe. I know that doing community-based research in a true spirit of egalitarianism, that is, it's going to be relevant, we're going to give back, the academic reward structure isn't set up to really sometimes support that kind of collaboration.

LR – No. Yeah, as I say, if I were a junior assistant professor, I might not have considered it because it is a bit of a risk, and especially since it's a shift in research specialization somewhat. I mean the mothering interest is there.

AR – Well tell me a little bit about the evolution of your interest in mothering and motherhood and how that came about.

{1:00:07}

LR – Well I mean obviously part of it was having children, but the very first thing that interested me, and it goes to show you how slow I work on some things, the very first project I did was on the mother-son relationship. I was very interested in power and gender, and you may have noticed on my CV there's an edited collection on the topic. But I thought, as I was reading in that literature, and I guess thinking about my own situation, I was thinking about the irony of being the mother of a son, but also about the whole power relation. That when you're the mother of a small infant or a small child, obviously the power relations are of the sort where you have, as a woman, you have a tremendous amount of influence on this little being. But then I was trying to imagine my son as he approached adolescence and into young adulthood, and how does that work then in terms of the power relations; as he takes on more and more patriarchal privilege what happens in terms of the relationship between the mother and the son? So I actually did an interview study where I was the interviewer and I was interviewing these young [men], using the participant pool so they were all introductory psychology students, but they were quite a range of ages actually. And yeah, again this was I think my second discourse analysis project that I did, and I used a kind of, I really had no models to go on, and so I kind of used a sort of semi-structured interview format based on – there were a few books at the time that focused on mothering and mother-son relationships – and I used that to generate my semi-structured questionnaire.

AR – Okay.

LR – I wrote this paper and I sent it out for review and I had quite a bit of trouble with the reviewers over the discourse analysis I had done, and over some of the analysis. The long and short of it is that I haven't published it yet, but I recently – there's a male graduate student in our program and last year as part of a course he did some more interviews, but more open-ended, and the idea was that we were going to collaborate on this project. Because a certain amount of time had lapsed between when those interviews were done and now, I thought we should do some more interviews and also some more kind of open-ended ones that are a little easier to use with the discursive approach that I am now more comfortable working in.

AR – Right, right.

LR – So I'm still interested in that and it's an interesting collaboration as well, to kind of have I guess a male perspective. We're still in the earlier stages of analysis but certainly his take on certain things, or the things that he noticed, are very different from or somewhat different from what I noticed. I mean there's certainly some overlap and I guess the interesting thing was that

overall I would say that the main things that strike you, listening to the interviews, are very similar across time. So there hasn't been a huge amount of change.

{1:04:33}

AR – Oh okay. Which is good news for being able to use the older interviews.

LR – That's right. Yeah I kind of felt badly. It was one of those projects where I was really interested and I did all this, and I submitted this article and I did some revisions, and then I had another set of revisions to do, and I just never got them done.

AR – Yeah.

LR – I can't recall – I think it was in the middle of all of my administration and young children. You know you were talking earlier about balancing and I think my coping strategy sometimes is just to let things go.

AR – Yeah, yeah, wow. Well tell me, you're mentioning discourse analysis as a method that you've been now working with for a little while. How has it been to attempt to publish pieces where you've used discourse analysis? What has that been like, trying to get stuff like that published in psychology?

LR – I think I've had reasonably good success. I mean I haven't published a huge number of articles in peer reviewed journals. I don't have a bunch of rejected papers sitting in the file drawer if that's what you're thinking. The mother-son one is one where I think persistence would have eventually paid off; I just kind of lost my momentum at that moment. I always tell my graduate students persistence is half the game, you know, just hang in there.

AR – It is, yeah.

LR – But certainly I think there are challenges, and again, I guess to provide the nuance, it's not as though there's kind of a qualitative community where anything goes. I mean there are debates about discourse analysis as well, you discover. So you critique the mainstream and you move over to this alternative. Well there are other people who are using that alternative who have their own views, and discourse analysis I guess is an interesting approach because now there are many varieties, and depending on who the reviewers are, they may or may not like the particular approach you've taken. There are some pretty difficult theoretical challenges in that approach, so I don't want to say that it's just politics, it's not. I mean there are theoretical divides about what's what, and what's the best way to do it, and what kind of assumptions can you make, and so on and so forth.

AR – Right. What do you, in looking now at the subfield or field of feminist psychology, what do you hope for the future of feminist psychology, that is where would you like to see it going? If you could choose, where would you like to see there be further development, or in twenty years from now, where would you like to see it heading?

{1:07:55}

LR – Well I think although some of the feminist scholarship has been absorbed into the mainstream, it's not always absorbed as explicitly feminist work. And so I think what would be ideal for me would be for feminist psychology to be seen as a kind of meta-theoretical framework for the discipline, and to be recognized in that kind of a way.

AR – And what do you think would have to happen within the discipline for that to take place, or for that to take hold?

LR – Well I think that is more political, right? But also, again, when you think about what feminist psychology is, there is a lot of variety there, and a lot of what is considered feminist psychology is pretty traditional in terms of the kind of meta-theory of psychology. It's not positivist in the traditional sense, but it's certainly not constructionist in the way [my take on constructionism would be] would be my constructionist take. I mean there are certainly lots of feminist psychologists who say, well yes these things are socially constructed, but what it comes down to is that the cognitive representations are socially constructed, but they're still looking for cognitive representations in the head.

AR – Right.

LR – And still using the kind of variable-let's measure it-approach to understanding psychological phenomena. So I suppose my ideal feminist psychology would be one that has moved away from that orthodoxy and adopted a more critical alternative approach to scholarship.

AR – Do you have any advice, or what would be your advice for a feminist psychologist entering the field now?

LR – You know, in a way that question really focuses on the individual and I guess my thinking is that what allows me to be what I am, in a way, is the kind of support that I get. So I was fortunate to get accepted to graduate school at a time when there was reasonably good support for graduate students. I was fortunate to get an academic job, I was fortunate as a graduate student to meet certain people that had influences on my thinking that moved me in the direction of feminism. When I got to the University of Calgary, there were people there who supported that and nurtured that kind of feminist orientation. Within my own department we were able to establish a theory and history program, so that you have again a little critical mass of people that you can work with and that can support your students as well. So I think, I don't know if this is advice or not, but it seems to me that you need to find a place where that support can come. And sometimes it is just a matter of being in the right place at the right time. So like even being on this research project was a bit of luck in a kind of way. You know it has to do I guess with some of the strengths that I, the contributions that I can potentially make, and I've had to work hard to establish a place for myself in the project and build relationships with the other people that I'm working with, but that kind of thing again [also] too supports. But as an individual feminist I think you have to, you can't assume that there are certain things that you can do alone.

{1:12:43}

AR – Yeah, yeah.

LR – And there have been other organizations at the University of Calgary as well, you probably read in my CV the Institute for Gender Research. It's not been hugely successful but at certain points it was a kind of home in a way, another home for me, a place to go to meet other feminist scholars and have support for the work I was doing.

AR – Yeah. Is there anything I haven't asked you about, about feminism, psychology, your career, being a woman in psychology, that you would like to add?

LR – Well I guess I see myself as a fairly ordinary feminist psychologist, so that's one of the awkward parts of being a part of this project. You know maybe I still have this idea of history as sort of the great women of psychology. So I'm not sure what else I could contribute really.

AR – Well I'm curious, I mean I can guess, but what kind of feminist psychologist do you consider yourself to be?

LR – What kinds are there?

AR – Well I'm going to rule out feminist empiricist from what you've talked about.

LR – Yeah.

AR – Standpoint feminist, post-modern feminist, social constructionist feminist, feminist social constructionist. Maybe those overlap, they probably do.

LR – Yeah I guess I would put myself more in the post-modern camp because of the version of discourse analysis that I like, or I've used, or I find useful. But then on the other hand I have this project on intimate partner violence where that would sort of put me more in the feminist empiricist camp. Although I suppose as a post-modern woman I can do this.

AR – You can choose.

LR – I can be contradictory and unpredictable and challenge the boundaries a little bit.

{1:15:04}

AR – Well this is sort of a related question, and this doesn't have anything now to do with psychology, but let's just talk about feminism generally and the state of feminism today. It is a topic of great interest to some of the students I'm working with and I think probably some of your students as well. So what does it mean to be feminist in 2007, where are we at? Some people talk about third wave, fourth wave, post-modern, racialized feminism. What has post-modernism brought to feminism? I mean I'm just asking to you to kind of conjecture about what that is like now.

LR – Yeah, well it's interesting because I've never really been a feminist activist in the traditional sense. I was certainly influenced by many who were. You know I was kind of I guess late in my development to – you know as a student and whatnot I was not involved in feminist political work. I was involved in the peace movement for some time, so that certainly had overlaps; there were many feminists in the peace movement as well. So I've never been politically active as a feminist which I guess is why I sort of see myself as an ordinary feminist psychologist. But on the same token I suppose, just by virtue of being feminist, that is a political statement in and of itself, and you do have I guess some influence on some students and some colleagues in that regard. You kind of embody a certain point of view and that strikes me as not completely useless. And I'm always impressed when I meet a student who tells me that she's feminist because I think that's, or someone's who's willing to say in my class that they're feminist or they're pro-feminist, because I think that in the current university climate that is a useful thing.

AR – Yeah, yeah. Why don't we stop there.