Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Louise Silverstein

Interviewed by Leeat Granek
New York City, NY
September 4, 2006

When citing this interview, please use the following citation:

Silverstein, L. (2006, September 4). Interview by L. Granek [Video Recording]. Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. New York City, NY.

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 Louise Silverstein
Interviewed by Leeat Granek
New York, NY
September 4th, 2006

LS: Louise Silverstein, Interview Participant
LG: Leeat Granek, Interviewer

LG – How and when did you first develop a feminist identity?

LS – Well, I think, that's a complicated question. I developed a feminist identity before I was really aware of having developed it. It seeped in [as a result of] my father [passing away] when I was five. My mother had to go to work; I was raised by a working mother. She took me back to Cleveland, to [live with] her mother and father and also her sister and I was raised in an extended family. Her sister was also a workingwoman. She didn't have any children so I was surrounded by two workingwomen in the '50's, which was very unusual. I was raised in an extended family, so I understood the meaning of not having a man in one's life, of women having to work, it kind of came in through the air conditioning system. I'm not sure exactly how I developed the fierce need to have a career; I think it may have been that my father really loved the fact that I was smart. Not that I was really smart, but I could talk and memorize nursery rhymes and I think that that made a big impression on me, in terms of that it was gratifying to be smart. Maybe even from a non-feminist perspective, it was gratifying in terms of being with a man who valued me for being smart. My mother and my aunt both had to work. I was raised in New Orleans for the first five years of my life. Then [I] went to a very high French Catholic school where we said [the] Hail Mary everyday in front of a picture of the Madonna with incense burning. Then I went to Cleveland to my mother's family and my first real memory of being in Cleveland is marching around an Orthodox shul for Simchat Torah. I think for a six-year-old, religion [meant] ritual and food and loving family and I didn't [truly] understand anything about it.

In New Orleans, I spoke English and French and in Cleveland I learned Yiddish in self-defense because my grandparents spoke mostly Yiddish around me. During the rest of my childhood, I never went back to New Orleans and [therefore], I never really understood my father's family. So for college, I went back to New Orleans and that [city encompassed] a very traditional Southern woman's context. I kept letting go of little things. [For example], when I [initially] got there, my hair was set and then blow dried and then sprayed, when you walked out into the New Orleans humidity, it was hopeless! So I let go of that. My make- up would start dripping, so I gave up all of that stuff. It wasn't from a feminist perspective though. I wasn't really thinking as I do now; I talk to my nieces [now]; "While you're blow-drying your hair, your brother is thinking about

architecture school." I happened to run into a man who was interested in having a relationship with a smart woman and someone who actually worked and had a career. He was also Southern, so it was impressive for him to emerge in that way.

Nevertheless, I got married right before my 21st birthday on the day of graduation, because that was the expectation then. Women went to college, and not everyone finished college, but the goal was to get a man. So I finished college and I got married. Actually, I had two very important male professors who were my mentors and they nominated me for a Woodrow Wilson fellowship. [They] told me that I couldn't get the fellowship if I stayed at Tulane [University] because [it required you] to do graduate work at a different institution. They asked me not to get married, to [accept] the fellowship –which they thought I could [get], go somewhere else and get married later. I couldn't give up getting married, so I got married [and] didn't get the fellowship. Many years later I went back to Tulane [University] and gave a talk. I invited [the same two] professors [who nominated me]. They came and I acknowledged that they had been right, even though I was still married to the same man, they had been right. I should not have gotten married at that time.

So I was sort of coasting along without any feminist understanding, but I was doing a lot of things that were both feminist and not feminist. Then we came to New York and I ended up in graduate school. I did not identify as a feminist at all. Iris Fodor was my mentor at NYU. I remember I was in analysis at the time and I had a dream. Iris, at the time, was a professor, she was publishing, she was presenting. In the dream, we were in the hallway together and I was in this very psychoanalytic analysis. I dreamt that Iris had taken a penis somehow and put it in the belt of her skirt and was marching along. I realized that I saw Iris as a very powerful professional and I was aspiring to be that way.

The other thing that I did, [which I believe] was also very feminist but I didn't [interpret it as such] then, was delaying having children until I finished my coursework. In the 1970's, it was again very unusual for a woman to do that, at least in my extended family and broader social circle. Among my friends in graduate school, it was more common. I lived in Brooklyn Heights and I didn't know anyone else who was in graduate school [or] any other woman who had a professional identity. All of the women were full time mothers or worked part-time, but were not identified as professional women. When I had my first child at 30, which was very late at that point in history, I had it at a hospital in Brooklyn that had a large contingent of Orthodox Jewish doctors. When I was assigned a pediatrician for my newborn, he came into interview me and he said, "Did you have trouble getting pregnant?" And I said, "No." He said, "That's hard for me to believe." And I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I know how old you are!'" And of course in his world, having one's first child at 30 was very unusual. So I [asked], "What are you talking about?'And he said, "Well you're 30." And I said, "Yes, but I'm the first person among my friends to have a child."Which was true, most of my friends in graduate school weren't even married at that point. For me, the decision felt pragmatic, I wasn't identified as feminist. Then I become a mother, and that completely radicalized me.

LG – How so?

LS – My husband was a very involved father and very dedicated but he worked full time and had a demanding job; I was the one who cut back. I didn't work for several months and then I was testing part time. My analyst and the entire [professional] culture felt that children needed [their] mothers full time, and even [during the] little bit [of time] that I was away [from my child], I was getting a lot of negative feedback. I realized that if I was going to have the career that I wanted, my husband was going to have to kick up his involvement dramatically and that became a long and interesting negotiation with my husband. I now see that negotiation as much less personal than political. At the time, I suddenly realized that everything I had read or heard about feminism, (this is 1976) I was living in my life. So I began to think about it and write about it and I still am.

For our second child, it was Barry, [my husband], who stayed closer to home. He changed jobs. It was in the '80's, Jesse was born in '83. Again there were 7 years in between my kids because I had to finish my dissertation. Eva was five when we first started thinking about having another child. The '80's were very corrupt, people made a lot of money but there was a lot of corruption. My husband is a Manhattan corporate attorney and was very turned off by the whole scene. So he quit his job and took a 90% pay cut and opened his own practice out of our house. So he then became the first line parent. I had a large private practice, about 26 hours a week. Until that moment I had been picking the kids up from school and driving Eva to ballet class twice a week, to my regret at the moment since she has become a professional dancer. I felt very lonely and isolated. I was either alone in my office with clients or with the kids. I really missed being in the academic world. So I [began to] write and tried to get a job in academia. I increased my practice dramatically and Barry took over with the kids.

I remember when he just started doing this, we were invited to someone's 50th birthday party. This was someone who was very prominent in the Manhattan corporate world. Her birthday party was [at] Windows on the World in the World Trade Center. It was very fancy and everyone there was an attorney or an investment banker. I remember on the way home, my husband [said] to me that he felt really badly because everyone there was talking about the last deal that they had worked on. He didn't have a deal to talk about. And I said "I know, but isn't it sad that you couldn't talk about how great it felt to pick up Jesse from school and take him for ice cream and feel great about being a great dad." At that point I began to think about all of the issues for men as well as women and I became very involved in my research [on fathering].

I actually did get a position at Yeshiva University. I was looking for someone and here is a sad story that I am getting ready to start writing about; the difficulty in general of women helping each other, cooperating, [and] collaborating with each other. One of the reasons that I agreed to do this interview is because [of] Division 35: [Society for the Psychology of Women] at APA. [It is] the only place in my life where I have ever been mentored by women and its the most supportive element in my life on that issue.

I got the job at Yeshiva because I had written an article about daycare. It had been very controversial because I was arguing that the failure of daycare in this country [was due]

to psychology's focus on the negative consequences of 'other than mother' care. [I consider it] a misogynist perspective [and] unfortunately [it] continues today. I reviewed 25 years of research in Western and Eastern Europe that there were no negative consequences of high quality daycare. [I] talked about how difficult it made women's lives [to] not have affordable and accessible daycare. I also wrote about the issue of men not becoming active fathers and [not] really sharing the responsibility with women. Women weren't 'having it all' they were having to do it all! So that article got me the job. I wanted someone to collaborate with and of course, I first spoke to women on the faculty. No one wanted to have anything to do with the topic of fathers. I wanted to start studying fathers and gender socialization from a man's perspective. [I wanted to] think about how we can change the world to help fathers be more involved in the way that my husband was being involved, [although he was] struggling with it. No one wanted to touch that.

LG – Why do you think that is?

LS – I think that there was too much competition between me and the other women who were there. And the one woman who was the self-proclaimed feminist on the faculty didn't want to share that title. The other woman was so psychoanalytically imbued with the maternal attachment hypothesis that the idea of generating a research project that might challenge that hypothesis made her uncomfortable. So, I ran into Carl Auerbach, literally, a graduate student brought us together. He was very interested in working on fathering. So we began our collaboration, which has really made my life worth living at Yeshiva. Carl and I have been working together for 12 years, and we have created a huge database of qualitative research on fathers. That work also integrated me into the Division on Men and Masculinity [Division 51] in APA. I developed collaborative relationships with Ron Levant and Gary Brooks in particular. I learned a lot from Jim O'Neil and Joe Pleck and Glenn Good. I would say those are the five male scholars in this area from whom I've learned the most. I think it's interesting that as a radical feminist therapist, more than half of my practice is with men. First of all, it's unusual to have that many men in one's practice, because the number of men vis-à-vis women, the proportion in therapy, is very small, but [it is] particularly [unusual] for a feminist. I think it's the work that I did in Division 51 and the work I did with Ron and Gary and Jim, Joe, and Glen that really taught me how much of an individual man's behavior is also political, i.e., socially constructed. That perspective has helped me be more empathic and I think helped men change. That was a very long answer to one question!

LG – When you say 'radical feminist' what do you define as a radical feminist?

LS – I use that term because I think that it's a term that people who are not feminist use to try to undermine women. It is like queer politics, I want to flaunt it! I believe in equal opportunity for men and women and in "de-gendering" our understanding of behavior, which is a challenge, even for me.

LG – Did you have any kind of involvement in the feminist movement at the time?

LS – No! I was a Southern Belle at the time.

LG – I read that essay, "Insider/Outsider" and you talk about your upbringing. You mentioned [being] Catholic and also Jewish. How did these intersecting identities merge for you with feminism, if at all?

LS – I think one of the things in that essay that was probably [most] implicated in my feminist identity was the class issue. Growing up as a poor child in a wealthy suburb outside of Cleveland, in Shaker Heights**,** I realized that part of the reason we were so poor was because I didn't have a father. We didn't have a man and a man's income in our family. So I think class was very integral to my feminist identity. In terms of the ethnic issues, I'm not sure how it constructed a feminist identity. We decided to raise our children Jewish. My mother was Jewish, so I'm considered Jewish and my husband is Jewish. We put Eva into Sunday school but we had no involvement with the synagogue. So of course, at some point she decided that she didn't want to have any [involvement with the synagogue] either and really confronted us with our hypocrisy. For me it was important for my children to have a community because my life had been so disrupted. I really wanted her to have that community. So I began to go to synagogue and I began to go to chavurah and read the Torah and learn about the Jewish religion. And of course, one can't help but notice the misogyny threaded through the Old Testament. So I started learning about feminist theology and created a siddur and a service called 'God as a Woman.' I began to really push the envelope in my synagogue on feminist issues and I happened to have a wildly feminist rabbi. A man! The most feminist rabbi I've ever known and I've known many female rabbis. I've learned a lot about feminist theology. I don't see Judaism as constructing my feminist identity, but rather my feminist identity constructing my spirituality.

LG – Did any of those identities influence your work as a psychoanalyst?

LS – I'm a family therapist.

LG – So as a family feminist therapist. You talk a little bit about this in the essay, but I wanted to ask you again so that we have it on tape.

LS – Well, I think the death of my father constructed a huge amount of my identity. I became a family therapist as a result. I was trained at NYU, which was very psychoanalytic, very psychodynamic. I had a really classical object-relations psychoanalytic training. Then I went to work in a city hospital in Brooklyn and found that working with children was really impossible without working with their families. So then I began a long span, ten or fifteen years, of post-graduate work and being supervised by many prominent family therapists. I was lucky enough to have many family therapist superstars in the New York area. Then I went to Bowen center in Georgetown. I am a person in search of my father's family. In terms of 'family of origin' work, which is the kind of family work that I do, [it's] all something that I do for myself. [An example of its benefit to me was] going back and finding my French family in France and reconnecting with them.

I think because of my feminist identity, I'm always thinking about how gender socialization is constructing the behavior of both men and women in families and I think I'm also much more focused on power in relationships than someone who is not a feminist family therapist. In fact, that has gotten me in trouble professionally at Yeshiva. Although my Chair and my Dean have always totally supported my work, my peers are almost 100% analysts, so when I talk about power in couple's therapy, they feel offended and they challenge my work in front of students. They have said in the past they would never refer anyone to me and wouldn't let me teach their classes. For example, once I said that if a couple comes to me and the woman does not work and has no visible means of survival if she had to leave her husband, I will raise that as an issue in therapy. Talking about power in general is difficult. People will say things like, "My student is taking your class and she says you won't work with someone if the wife is a full-time mother." It's not that I won't work with that person, but I will bring up that issue. If that issue isn't going to be addressed, then there is no point with them working with me and I will refer them out to someone else. I was teaching Betty Carter's perspective, she's a very famous feminist family therapist. She was working with older couples, in which the husband has retired and the wife had never worked. The wife had no assets in her own name. In order for the couple to come into therapy with Betty, the husband would have to agree to put 50% of the assets in his wife's name before he had the privilege of entering therapy. That idea, which made total sense to me, was very offensive to someone who doesn't have a feminist sensibility.

LG – I wanted to ask you about working at Yeshiva. Is it considered to have a psychoanalytic orientation? Or is it a conservative school because it's Orthodox?

LS – Actually the undergraduate colleges are Orthodox, there is a women's college and a men's college. But all of the graduate schools are secular. For example, Albert Einstein is the medical school, Cardozo is the law school and Ferkauf is the Graduate School of Psychology where I work.

LG – You were talking about Yeshiva.

LS – At Yeshiva, in general my work life has been good. My Chair and my Dean are extremely supportive. There is always a small minority of Orthodox graduate students, which is probably a larger number at Yeshiva than there would be elsewhere. Some of those graduate students often have difficulty with my work. In recent years, I've been teaching a gender course. In my mind, the only way we can understand observed behavioral differences between men and women, boys and girls, is to think about what part is biology and what part is culture. The best way to think about what part is biology and what part is culture is to understand first non-human primates, because chimpanzees and bonobos share 98.6% of our DNA with us. We are all primates after all. I also then look at hunting gathering families and agricultural families and trace the evolution of families.

So it's a very multidisciplinary course and that's unusual in psychology in general. Most people are sort of uncomfortable about that. The idea of talking about our primate

brothers and sisters is offensive to some religious people because human beings are supposed to be unique and created by God. So that can be a problem. As I trace through human history, one can't avoid looking at theology and its patriarchal spin. There's a particular book that I use called *Sarah the Priestess* and it's written by a feminist theologian named] Savina Teubal. hat she does is look at [the book of] Genesis and take out all of the parts that have to do with Sarah, [the wife of Abraham]. Then she puts [the excerpts] together and argues that Genesis was originally a story about Sarah, whom she thinks was a priestess of the goddess religion. If one goes back to Paleolithic times, one sees that from the North of Spain through the Caucus Mountains, there were these small figures of women, mostly pregnant women or post partum women, fecund women and very intimate goddesses that could fit in the hand of a person. Teubal argues that these goddess figures represent a world-wide Goddess religion and what happened was [that] the new religion, based on a male god, took over the goddesses story and incorporated it into a new patriarchal religion. Sarah was a priestess in the goddess religion and this whole beginning of Genesis was about Sarah. I think she makes a very strong case. That's upsetting to people who truly believe that Genesis was given to Moses on Mount Sinai as the word of God. So what I do is present an alternative interpretation, which people are free to accept or reject but must learn about. We go on from there.

LG – Do you teach the undergraduates as well?

LS – No. So that's the bottom up problem at Yeshiva (students' discomfort with feminist theory). [An example of] the top down problem [was] when Carl and I wrote a particular article in 1999 about deconstructing the essential father; we talked about how neoconservatives were really saying that social problems were caused by poor Black and Latino men who didn't have fathers in their families. [The neoconservatives argued that] if these men would just marry the mothers [of their children], we wouldn't have to put any more money in education, low-cost housing, after-school programs, etcetera. I got mad about the distortions, [so] Carl and I wrote this article. It was published in *American Psychologist.*

I never anticipated that it would be picked up by the popular press. But the political right knew that our argument about how they had misrepresented the research was accurate. So they had to disqualify us and distort what we were saying. Their critique got picked up by CNN, about 130 newspapers all over the country and 75 talk radio shows. It ended up on the front page on the *Jewish Forward*. Some people from the Yeshiva community got very upset about it. My Chair and my Dean really supported me, but people were calling the university's President and saying they would never give another penny to Yeshiva. One of the things that we had written was that if you look at the research on gay and lesbian families, the children turn out just fine. Some people in the Yeshiva community were upset that we were supporting homosexuality. The President did the right thing and said that even though he didn't agree with our views, Yeshiva University supported academic freedom. I did get tenure but it was a very tense summer for us.

On the other hand, when I was an adjunct professor at NYU, teaching the Psychology of Parenting, someone called up and complained to the Chair that I was saying that human

beings were the same as monkeys and [asked] why they [had me as a member of] faculty. That was [at] NYU, one of the premier secular universities [so] these ideas are threatening to many people, not just the religious community.

LG – Well, it's just so interesting that you obviously touched a nerve. If there's no truth in it, then why bother getting so upset? Ok, so what attracted you to psychology in the beginning as an area of study?

LS – Well, I think unconsciously it's what I said before. I really am a person in search of a family.

LG – You started out knowing that you wanted to do family therapy?

LS – No, no, no, unconsciously I said! No. The way I got interested in it was [due to the fact that] I was very lost in the world of cerebral international politics. I had an undergraduate degree in political science and I began my graduate study at Tulane and I was just bored with it.

LG – At Tulane?

LS – The reason that I was staying at Tulane was because my husband could get his MBA in one year at Tulane because he had done his undergraduate work there. So we stayed in New Orleans for an extra year, and I started graduate work there. I had been accepted to the doctorate program in political science but I was just bored with it. After a semester I dropped out and his fellowship was cancelled. So we had nothing to live on. So I got a job teaching third grade. That was during segregation; white families were taking their children out of public school and putting them in private schools. I was able to get a job in a private school with no educational background in teaching. So I started teaching and I became fascinated with how kids were learning. Some kids learned, others didn't, I didn't understand why.

Then we came to New York and my husband and a close friend were going into the business world. In my previous doctoral program, computers were just coming in for analyzing research data. I knew nothing about computers and I thought, 'Well, why not learn about this computer stuff?' So I got a job learning how to do computer programming and systems analysis at Equitable Insurance in New York. After six months I was acutely suicidal! I wasn't really suicidal, but I was depressed and I knew this was not for me. I didn't know exactly what to do, so I started thinking about it and I went back and got my Masters in Educational Psychology at NYU. From my masters I went into the doctoral program in School Psychology. I met Iris in the Master's program and she helped me get into the doctoral program at NYU. So going into family therapy was really [done] unconsciously. I thought I was interested in how kids learn, but I was really interested in understanding myself as an outsider. I had been raised in a very unusual family. Most people are not raised in an extended family with, what I now think of as, 'allomothers,' i.e. my grandmother and my aunt.

LG – Allomothers?

LS – Yes that's a term from behavioral ecology. If you look at hunting gathering families, in all kinds of non industrial cultures –which are our best guess in terms of the evolutionary environment of families in the beginning of human history– what's clear is that the difference between survival, death, and thriving of infants and children was the number of non-biological parental figures. Women had to help other mothers mother their children. In some cultures, fathers, or men, are alloparents as well. Many men will help women, even if the paternity is uncertain. But in all cultures where the children thrived, other females, some who are related and some who are not, are what make the differences in children's survival and thriving. Which brings me back to my daycare hypothesis. Almost all the workers are female and I'm beginning to think now that growing up having so many really important aunts and a good relationship with my grandmother was essential. My mother went to work and my grandmother was home, so totally unconsciously, this affected my feeling about the importance of both fathering and daycare.

LG – How did you come to do a dissertation on childbirth techniques? Where did that come from?

LS – I started out in the beginning of my feminist identity looking at feminism in Freudian and psychoanalytic theory; looking at Karen Horney and Clara Thompson and all of the important female psychoanalysts and Freud's theory of sexuality and so on. I was beginning to be interested in that because I was pregnant or thinking about getting pregnant at the time. I couldn't figure out where to go with it and then I was pregnant. My delivery was not a happy one. I went to a natural childbirth class, which one would think is very feminist because you are trying to have childbirth without being involved in the male medical establishment. The childbirth coach that taught the classes in 1976, in New York City, Greenwich Village, told us all about natural childbirth and then said, "Don't worry dears." Figuratively patting us on the head, "If you need a cesarean, your doctor will know what to do."

So I had no information about a cesarean, what choices I had, [or] what to expect. I, in my grandiosity, felt like mother earth and never imagined that I would need a cesarean. But in fact I needed a cesarean and I didn't know what to expect and I was very traumatized. I didn't know what my choices were and it was a very unhappy experience. So I decided to try and master that experience by looking at childbirth for women. My bias was that the more natural the childbirth, the better it would be for both mother and the baby. The most natural procedure at that point was something called Leboyer. After the baby was born, she was put into [a] warm water bath to simulate the womb and then put on the mothers belly. Instead of being whisked away and put into the nursery, they were put on the mother's belly and the mother was encouraged to nurse on the delivery table. This is now standard procedure, but then [it] was really radical. So I compared Leboyer and straight, natural, childbirth without all the bathing and the nursing [which I also considered to be more medicalized]. I looked at 130 infant/mother pairs and I think I

had total data on 80 [infant/mother pairs] because I followed them through four months postpartum.

What I found was the most feminist finding and one that was unexpected for me. The best experience of childbirth was if the mother got what she wanted. It didn't matter whether [it was] medicalized or natural. There were some mothers who really wanted to be unconscious. They wanted to turn over all the power to the male doctor, if they got what they wanted, they were calm and happy and the babies were calm and happy. There were very little differences in the babies actually, but there were differences in the mothers. If the mothers wanted natural childbirth and got a medicalized cesarean, she was not happy. So really the point was women need to have the power to ask for what they want and to get it. So that also contributed to radicalizing me in terms of my feminist identity. Those findings were a total surprise to me.

LG – Was your second delivery better?

LS – It was better because I knew I was going to have a cesarean.

LG – Ok, so as you look back on your program of research, what do you see as the major themes?

LS – Well I would say certainly, first of all power, empowering the participants. Whether it's empowering mothers or fathers [during the process of] fathering research. Carl is a methodologist and a statistician, so he had a [a role in introducing] qualitative research at Yeshiva. I couldn't have done that without him as non- tenured faulty. When we began our fathering research, as far as I know, no one was talking to fathers. Mainly researchers were asking mothers what their husbands did and some researchers were observing mothers and fathers at home. However, most studies conceptualized fathers' behaviors through a matricentric lens. We were the first researchers to ask fathers what their thoughts and feelings were about fathering. At the end of the focus group we ran, the fathers said they felt so empowered and wanted us to stay with them and have more group meetings because where do men ever get to talk about their children with other men? Even now, 13 years later! I think empowering the participants, giving people voice is very important in my work. Well, I think that covers everything, whether it's my research with fathers or with couples or with women. That's the point.

LG – What is family feminist therapy in your view?

LS – Well feminist family therapy is thinking about how behavior is both personal and political and how to equalize power in personal relationships. For example, my good friend Thelma Jean Goodrich, with whom I edited the feminist family therapy book, asks us to think about whether sex in marriage can ever be totally non-coercive when men are bigger and stronger and usually make more money. How much power do most women have to say "No."? I don't know anyone else who is taking on that question other than Thelma Jean. Those are the kinds of things that I work with my clients to think about as well.

LG – Are there any foundational things to family feminist therapy? Things that are always true across the board? Power analysis would be one of them.

LS – Power analysis is one. How much of our behavior is due to socialization and how much is biological? I'm always looking at that. Challenging both men and women to think about their stereotypes, example: how much about mothering is also totally socialized. Explicitly taking a stand, I think, is important in feminist work of all kinds. From my perspective, everyone has biases and everyone actually is taking a stand but feminist family therapy makes your stand explicit. So your clients can challenge it and accept it or not accept it. The point is that it's not implicit. You are not denying it or trying to be objective. It's funny because my bias is really to save marriages. I have to really work on that and remind myself that there are many marriages [that] are not worth saving. But you know, I think it's certainly a much more conscious issue for me as a therapist now. For a while I didn't really realize that my preference would be to help people work it out here rather than to separate. I feel that I've really given that up in a big way but I still need work on it. I need to be vigilant about myself on that issue. Probably that's because of the major trauma and disruption that my father's death had caused in my life. That trauma predisposes me to keep marriages and families together and that's something that continues to affect me. It's one of my core issues in countertransference and I am working on that as a therapist.

LG – Can you tell me a little bit about your involvement with feminist organizations in psychology? You did work in APA on the Committee on Women in Psychology.

LS – I'm currently Chair of that committee. Well, that's the only area that I'm willing to be involved in at APA because although I'm pretty good at politics, I really don't like it. I was originally involved in the Division of Family Psychology as part of my campaign to get tenure. As a typical woman, I felt I had to work harder and do more to get tenure. So in addition to publishing, teaching and research, I decided I would be involved in APA governance as well. Also because my work is so controversial, I didn't want anyone to be able to challenge me on any issue in terms of tenure. So I was involved for five years in the Division of Family Psychology and ultimately became President. Then I got tenure and then I tried to infuse a feminist and multicultural perspective in that division. It was challenging. Although I just got an APA award from that division for my distinguished contribution to diversity in family psychology, it certainly was not what I had hoped for. So I took a break from involvement in governance.

LG – When you say it's not what you had hoped for, what do you mean?

LS – Well, I would have hoped that more people of color would have been elected to governance in the division, that a more authentic and far ranging commitment to diversity in terms of programming [would have been implemented]. In terms of just the way that the division lived and breathed would be true now, ten years later, twelve years later. There is change but I would have hoped it would have been faster and more far-reaching.

So then I took a break and got involved only in Division 35 and that's really where my involvement has been but I have not been that involved because politics are just difficult for me. Karen Wyche and I tried to breathe life into the feminist therapy academy training, I forget exactly what it was called, [by trying] to have feminist conferences around the country. She and I did a lot of work in 2001 to 2002 and no one was interested in signing up for a full day, even at NYU in New York City. That was my main involvement in Division 35 recently. Then I decided to run for CWP, the Committee on Women in Psychology, and I did get on the committee and this is my third year. Two people are elected every year and in their third year one of them is Chair and one of them is Vice-Chair and I happened to be Chair this year.

It's a huge amount of work to be on CWP because it's a women's organization. I was involved in the Division of Family Psychology and was Secretary and President and still didn't do half as much work as CWP does. The Committee monitors everything that is going on within APA as a national organization that impacts women, which is basically everything. So we monitor, we have initiatives. Our latest is a task force on the sexualization of girls. I'm also very involved in trying to infuse a more integrated multiculturalism into the graduate curriculum so that it's not just either feminism or race/ethnicity, but feminism, race/ethnicity, disability, social class and so on. CWP will be very involved in the APA task force on the effects of abortion. It's very intense and one of our initiatives also is to get more qualified feminist women elected to boards and committees and to national office. Most recently, this last APA convention in 2006, we entered into collaboration with Division 35 and the [APA] Women's Caucus of Council. In an effort to be more effective in getting women elected to boards and committees and to national office, Division 35, CWP, and the Women's Caucus of Council are becoming much more integrated and collaborative and we are going to be working together on this effort. I think, in the next 2-5 years, we will see many more women elected and appointed throughout APA at high levels. We're going to crash through the glass ceiling. I do want to underline my incredible feeling of gratitude towards Division 35 in terms of mentoring me both in the division and personally.

Anytime I've ever wanted to be nominated for something… for example when I ran for CWP, I could call Laura Brown and Karen Wyche and Norine Johnson and Cheryl Travis and ask for nomination letters. Many of them wrote in support of both my tenure and promotion to professor. When I was trying to get this very, very controversial article into the *American Psychologist*, Cheryl Travis, who was one of the action editors, really supported moving that article through. Whenever I have a question about how to deal [with] something in academia or at APA, I can call Norine [or] Laura. So it's an amazing experience. Iris did mentor me at NYU, that's about it in terms of women mentors.

LG – Who are your mentors in general?

LS – Iris and members of Division 35. In undergraduate, my two mentors were men and in graduate school, Iris and Gil Trackman at Yeshiva, Abe Givner and Larry Siegel and Carl Auerbach. This small number of mentors for women is something that really needs to change.

LG – Do you have a teaching philosophy?

LS – I think theory is really important. When I was taught therapy, especially family therapy, I was taught technique too much. I do a lot of lecturing on theory. Then in family therapy, I think it's really essential for people to work on their own families. I have all my students write a family origin paper for me, looking at three generations of their family and that also is very controversial because many psychologists feel that they are pathological. None of us go into this field because we have a happy family. Family therapy is really a natural system theory and there is no such thing as pathology. That is one [area of content] that is difficult to teach psychologists. So I really believe that it's important to get students to work on themselves. I also have students present a lot in class. I do an upfront amount of lecturing in the beginning of the semester and then I have the students do a lot of Powerpoint presentations now. [At first], there was kicking and screaming students. [Later on], A fancy psychologist [had] a big fancy lecture at YU, we all went to see it and she didn't have a Powerpoint presentation, these same students who had been kicking and screaming came and said, "I see what you mean." Having done it, they realized how much more professional it is.

I also really encourage students to come with me to conferences as part of their professional identity development. I also think it's really important for them to experiences themselves as psychologists. Also, I think it's really important to teach to the limbic system, especially in terms of multicultural education. Not just be in your cortex, but into the limbic system of your brain. So I give the students a lot of novels to read, [such as] *Beloved* and science fiction. I don't know if I sent you my article called 'Integrating Feminism and Multiculturalism.' [In that article], I use as a metaphor a science fiction heroine who is a vampire hunter. I gave this presentation at APA in 2005. I was on a panel on multiculturalism and there were very dry academic presentations before me and then I started talking about Anita Blake, the vampire hunter and describing how she was armed with knives and everything. I thought the audience was about to cart me away. People were responding to me like I was having a psychotic episode and I had asked my good friend, Bev Greene, to be there. She's such a great friend and she was the only friendly face in the audience. I kept looking at her, like a two-year-old looks at their mother as she's leaving them in daycare for the first time. There was total silence. I thought a lot of the presentation was really funny, it was tongue and cheek, but no one was laughing. I was just looking at Bev thinking, "Please don't let them take me away!" I was trying to appeal to the limbic system of my audience. I'm not so sure I succeeded. But I do think [that] if we're trying to look at our own prejudices and stereotypes, [it's important] for us to have an emotional component to learning. A long answer, but that's it.

LG – What would you like to see happening in the field of psychology in terms of the research that you do?

LS – Well of course I would like to see everyone doing qualitative research first. To generate hypotheses that emerge from the ground up, from the subjective experience of

the people we are actually studying and then to do more positivistic, hypothesis-testing research. I would like to see the benefits of research go to the people that we are studying, rather than to enhancing our careers. Someone, as a bad joke, has put me on a committee reviewing grants for NIMH, [The National Institute of Mental Health], on fathering. The proposal under review was testing hypotheses for which I feel we already have the answers and asking for millions of dollars to buy new computers. So my review [consisted of] recommending [that they] divide the amount of money that they are asking for by the number of participants and giving it directly to the participants instead of the professors. I'm not often asked back, obviously! I think it's very corrupt and very exploitive for psychology to study poor, fathers of color, just to stay in my own area, with hypotheses that are irrelevant to their lives. To spend huge amounts of money buying larger computers so that they can analyze data which will end up having no meaning. I would like to try to put an end to that.

LG – It sounds like you are talking about an ethic.

LS – Yeah, and what I'm interested in doing mainly now is participatory action research. Where the researchers and the participants co-construct the research and the outcome is an action plan that will improve the lives of the participants.

LG – What kind of barriers, obstacles [and] discrimination have you experienced because of your feminism or for being a woman in your career?

LS – After I had my second child when I was feeling very isolated, I couldn't decide whether I wanted to go back into a medical setting, which is where I had been trained, or academia, I applied to be head of Family Therapy at Roosevelt Hospital. I had actually been head of Family Therapy at the outpatient clinic at King's County hospital in between my two children. So I had a lot of experience in a medical setting, direct experience. I had left the medical setting and only done private practice because I had two children and I wanted to spend time with the kids. I didn't get the job. A man got the job;[he] had two kids and a wife at home. For me, that was totally a feminist experience because if I had a wife, I would not have decreased my involvement in paid work and I would have had those years in a medical establishment. So that is sort of a direct 'ah-hah' kind of moment.

In terms of discrimination, I think it's been mainly in reaction to my work. For example, [I received negative reactions to] the daycare article that was published in 1992, in which I said that we needed to stop looking at negative consequences of daycare and look instead at negative consequences of failure to provide daycare. Also, I recommend[ed] thinking about how to enhance father involvement. I looked at research on non-industrial families and quoted it in that article. One of the articles that I quoted talked about the differences between 'cads' and 'dads' which is nomenclature used in non-human primate research. It talks about [the fact that] in some non-human primate cultures, some males are involved in infant care and they are called 'dads.' In other contexts, males are not involved and those males are called 'cads.' I quoted the research and talked about where it came from. Then I said that we needed a lot of initiative to help encourage more US

men to become “dads” rather than “cads.”A psychologist sent me a copy of a letter that he had sent to the Committee on Ethical Violations of APA claiming that I had used sexist language, derogating American fathers. I got that letter in my first year of teaching at YU. Here I was back in a new environment, anxious about making it as a professor and I find out that someone has reported me to the APA Committee on Ethical Violations. That’s the kind of [obstacles and discrimination I have experienced], like the reaction to my and Carl’s 1999 article on ‘Deconstructing the Essential Father.’ Presenting at conferences and having people talk to me in a derogatory and almost abusive way and feeling very assaulted because of my feminist perspective.

Once (this is a tiny, micro problem), one of my students invited me to her externship which is on the Einstein campus. This particular setting is a place where we send externs all the time and my Chair really wanted to have a good relationship with them. She invited me to come and talk about fathering. So I began the presentation [at] the team meeting and I said, “I approach fathering from a feminist perspective.” The director of the clinic said, “Oh, I’ve never heard anyone openly admit that they were feminist before.” As if I was saying something shameful! This was happening in front of my students.

LG – What did he think feminism was?

LS – Well, I’m getting ready this afternoon, when we are finished, to teach my first class on integrating gender, race and ethnicity and multiculturalism and I will ask how many people in the class would define themselves as feminist. Usually almost no one raises their hands. Then I’ll ask them to define feminism and they think of women who are angry, strident, probably lesbian, [and] definitely unattractive. It’s not surprising that this man had negative connotations. When I define what feminism is, you can sort of hear the mutterings, “Well maybe I am a feminist.” It’s kind of like when African American kids, especially middle class kids, or any kinds of kids, who are raised in a warm and loving protective environment don’t understand racism until they go out and encounter their first racist experience. I think something similar happens to women. You have your first encounter with misogyny and then you have a chance to become radicalized. My students are very privileged and they really haven’t experienced sexism. So to them it’s an abstract [idea]; ‘What’s all the fuss about?’

LG – What advice would you give to a feminist woman working in psychology now?

LS – Find women to collaborate with. Of course, definitely find men. I just want to mention that Ron Levant for example is someone who has been incredibly supportive to me. He was President of APA last year. He has really mentored me in APA politics. He has been very helpful in getting my work into mainstream journals. Most recently, for example, he helped me shepherd a special section on qualitative research into *Professional Psychology*, which is not a place one would think of finding qualitative research. I don’t mean to say that we shouldn’t have male mentors. In fact, I always make the joke that you need to have a white man standing next to you in most areas if you want to have access to their power. But I think it’s really important for women to help women,

to collaborate and to be cooperative and to also fight the impulse to be competitive with other women that patriarchy constructs in us at a cellular level. I know that it's something I still have to fight when I find myself feeling negatively towards a woman. I sit and think; is this strictly a competitive impulse that's generated by patriarchy rather than something that is authentic to my values? I think that women decrease their power by not working together. So if there were one thing that I would advise all women, feminist or not, to do is to be collaborative with other women.

LG – Two more questions. What inroads have feminist made in psychology and what roadblocks still remain?

LS – Well, I think women have made a lot of inroads in psychology. Being on the Committee on Women in Psychology has been an incredible privilege. I can see how respected this Committee is within APA, how seriously it's taken. We do have [an] impact on policy. But you know, I'm a political scientist, so Patrick Henry said that the price of freedom is eternal vigilance. I'm impressed with the kind of progress we've made within APA as an institution. However, I think if we look at mainstream psychology, psychological theory and practice, feminism has not made many inroads. For example, my students have never heard of feminist therapy. They don't know anything about gender unless they have taken a women's studies course, [which is] most [likely] not in the psychology department. So I think we have huge work to do, integrating feminist theory and practice into mainstream psychology. I think psychology is still very male oriented, very patriarchal in theory and practice.

Laura Brown has transformed Henry's quote into "The price of feminism is eternal vigilance." For example, in family therapy, there are very few feminist family therapists. That's why Thelma Jean and I edited the book *Feminist Family Therapy*, [which] was published as part of the Division 35 book series. There is so little feminist family therapy being practiced. In 2005, at the Association for Family Therapy Association Conference, if my friend Rhea Almeda and I had not organized a panel on feminist family therapy, there would not have been one.

Several years ago at the International Feminist Therapy Association, there were two presentations that had the word 'feminist' in their title. So Division 35 I think is thriving and flourishing but it's like a ghetto, a 'gigetto', [I'm] thinking of the Jewish ghettos in Italy. I think that our influence is not as pervasive as it needs to be. Women, outside of a few major divisions, are still underrepresented in membership and wildly underrepresented in APA governance, particularly feminist women. Not every woman who gets into a position of power is interested in mentoring women and bringing other women up with her. So I think it's in the world right now, it's not just psychology, what's going on in the world, why feminism has failed, why feminism is dead, all of these articles published even by the *New York Times* about how young, white, well-educated women are having children and leaving the workforce. Well, they are leaving the workforce because doing it all is too stressful and if one has the option, enough money, one is likely to take it. Although they don't realize the cost … it's the same cost that I talked about when I didn't get the job, because even though I was still practicing, I wasn't

in a medical setting for three years. So I didn't have the CV that the man with the wife did. These women are so privileged that they may think that their Yale degree is going to get them a job when they come back after three, six, ten years and it isn't. I think the whole culture is very anti-feminist at the moment.

On the other hand, I think people are living more feminism then they realize. More women are working, more mothers have to go back to work and these issues are being negotiated at a personal level with no support from the government. Now 2/3 of divorces are initiated by women and I think they are initiated because, as one of my clients said, "It's easier to get a divorce than to have my husband help me with childcare." Right now there is a lot of press about how people in this country are having a third child. I have not checked those statistics, that data, I don't know if it's accurate. I would be surprised to hear that's it's accurate, because all over other industrial countries women are having one child, they are not even at replacement level. Once a country realizes that women are not having children, then all of the supports that women need in order to have children suddenly become government priority and that will happen here too. I am beginning to wonder whether this is propaganda. All of the data about how important it is to breastfeed one's child now. I don't believe that data, because that data suddenly surfaced. If you look at the data in Scandinavian countries, it only surfaced after women were really a major force in the workforce. What it does is encourage women to leave the workplace for longer. Whole generations of people were raised without being breastfed. In the '50's and '60's it was considered barbaric. When I was breastfeeding my child, it was like, "Can't you go into the bedroom, we don't want to see that happening!" In my spare time, someday I'll check that data, but [for now], eternal vigilance.

LG – Is there anything else that I haven't asked you about that you feel is important for me to know about yourself [concerning] your career [or] about psychology in general [or] feminism? Any of the topics that we have covered that I haven't asked that is important for me to know?

LS – One question that we haven't talked about and I don't really have an answer to is this question. I think we need to think about what the feminization of psychology has had as an impact on the field as a whole. We know that in other fields that they become feminized once they have lost status. And then the feminization of it seems to contribute to it continuing losing status. I don't really know, I think it's a tricky question. How much are we letting in men who are less qualified, in order to [increase] gender diversity in our classes? I don't know. Will psychology continue to lose status and prominence? I think that's something that has to be considered. At Yeshiva, for example, many of the women want to have a neuropsych practice because that's where the money is. What are the implications of that? That's one thing as feminists we have to think about.

LG – Thank you so much. This has been a very interesting interview. Thank you.

LS – Wait, Leeat, what is your last name?

LG – Granek.

LS – Ok, I just want to officially say that we have Leeat Granek to thank. She was really charming, extremely efficient, and a pleasure to work with.

LG –Thank you [laughing], that's so kind.