



**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project
Interview with Lynne Segal**

*Interviewed by Lois Donnelly over Zoom™
March 14, 2022*

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Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Lynne Segal

Interviewed by Lois Donnelly

Conducted over the Zoom online platform

March 14, 2022

Lois: I'm Lois Donnelly interviewing Professor Lynne Segal on 14th March 2022 over Zoom. We're discussing their life and career in the context of feminism and its history within psychology. First of all then, could you tell me a bit about yourself? Maybe a bit in terms of the trajectory of your career and the topics of your work, that sort of thing.

Lynne: Yes, absolutely. Nice to meet you, Lois. Well, I come from Sydney, and I grew up in the '50s and went to university in the '60s. Like I think many women who study psychology - and nowadays it's overwhelmingly women I think studying psychology, I noticed a change throughout my teaching career - I guess I studied psychology in order to understand people more. Which proved to be rather frustrating back in the '60s, because we mainly seemed to be running rats through mazes. As I've written elsewhere, this didn't actually even tell us anything about rats and their habitats. Nevertheless, for some reason I always seemed to do quite well in psychology, partly because I was criticising it all and then that became a part of my career. My career began as a sort of quite fierce criticism of the then discipline of psychology, which was overwhelmingly behaviouristic of course, ever since Watson introduced behaviourism and stimulus response theory into psychology. What I always thought from the very beginning of my studies in psychology is this wasn't what I wanted to study, although we did have, we studied abnormal psychology, which also seemed a rather odd thing to be studying. We would have one person teaching us about Freud and I always found that more interesting. I just began my career as a student of psychology in Sydney, Australia, and I began as a very critical critic of the discipline I was studying.

Lois: That's so interesting. Did that kind of path of critique continue on for you through your career?

Lynne: Well yes, I mean, it nearly ended my career, of course. My PhD was called *Conceptual Confusions in Experimental Psychology*, which comes from the closing words of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, saying psychology is a discipline of experimental methods and conceptual confusions. I thought, yeah, that's right. What you can tell from that PhD was that my main friends and contacts were actually philosophers. I was busy reading various philosophers, British and Canadian philosophers, saying that psychologists really don't know what they're doing. They think they're measuring physical responses and learning something about human behaviour, but actually they're learning nothing about human behaviour. The first thing to know about human behaviour is that it's rule-bound, or else dissident for certain rules, and you don't even understand what a person is doing outside of social and linguistic contexts, and I thought yes, that's right. That's what I did my PhD in, without a supervisor at all. It was marked by someone called Rose Boone in Canada, who I decided might pass it, and then Sigmund Koch, I think in Texas. Anyway, these were incredibly eminent people, heading up the major journals in psychology. There was no interview for the doctorate, I know I think from Koch there was just a telegram, 'Award degree immediately'. Then I had my degree, I had a doctorate from these eminent people approving it, but I couldn't get a job in psychology because what I was doing in terms of a theoretical critique of behaviourism was not seen as psychology. We should be in the laboratory running rats through mazes and seeing how long it took them to pick up their little bit of cheese or whatever. There were also perceptual experiments we could do, or there was something called group psychology that we studied. Which was nothing to do with actual social

groups, but of course laboratory groups where we studied things called conformity group influence. You probably know, they show you two lines and one line is longer than the other, and the experimenter has all his students insisting that the shorter line is longer and they see whether they can persuade you this is the case. We never got outside the laboratory to know what was going on in the world, which was the reason that I think many people like me wanted to study psychology. I had my licence to teach, but no one in Sydney was going to employ me. That led me to emigrate to Britain. I got my degree in '69 and I came to Britain at the end of 1970, where there was a large expansion of universities in the UK. Basically you could just walk into anything once you had a PhD. I applied for three jobs, I think, and got them all. I took the one nearest at Enfield College of Technology, because at this time I was always somehow wanting to be politically engaged. That was my primary concern, rather than to be an academic. Although I think I did get offered a job at Imperial College, I liked the idea of being at a technical college, so that's where I went and that's where I stayed for 29 years. I remember the nice journalist Melissa Benn was describing what happened to certain British feminists, and she said, well, many of them climbed the greasy pole of academia. I wrote to her later and said I didn't really climb any pole. What happened was this greasy pole with me on it at Enfield College of Technology then became Middlesex University - no, it became Middlesex Polytechnic, I'm sorry. Enfield College of Technology became Middlesex Polytechnic and then it became Middlesex University. I was there for 30 years and the pole pulled me up as I just stayed there anyway, involved in community politics and feminist activities and so on.

[0:07:56]

Lois: That's so interesting, and so I suppose there was a bit less of that barrier in Britain then to your work, maybe?

Lynne: Absolutely. Well, you see, it's interesting isn't it, because we think of the 1960s as the radical decade, but actually I think in universities, and particularly for women but also for Black people and other minorities, it was the 1970s that was really enabling people to be more creative within academia. Really we could do what we wanted, so I was officially teaching social psychology, but what was I able to teach were just all the things I was interested in around gender and exclusion of women from traditional mainstream psychology experiments. You didn't notice gender and you didn't notice class and you didn't notice race. These were all the things I taught, and it was very interesting. I remember one year the exam board, by this time I don't know if we were Middlesex Polytechnic or Middlesex University, I was there for 30 years. One person said, 'This isn't social psychology, this is about social issues,' so I changed the name of my course to psychology and social issues and continued teaching that. Which was very largely a critique of psychology for not properly engaging with these social issues. I was reading people like Stuart Hall and Fanon, as well as of course all the emerging psychologists, like Janet Sayers, or critiquing biological reductionism we'd read Anne Fausto-Sterling. All the sort of cutting edge, more critical writers of the day, plenty of people for us to be reading and teaching, and of course students were very interested on the whole in getting lectures that seemed relevant to them, rather than what I had been taught around these poor rats in their mazes or strange little perceptual experiments, or conformity activity in experimental laboratories. It was a great time really for the emergence of creativity in academia; a time which sadly has largely passed as universities have got so much more commodified in recent times. It was, I think, probably particularly nice in the polytechnics where there was slightly less pressure on us. Obviously we didn't have, there wasn't pressure on us to publish. In fact, the strange thing was I was publishing, because I was writing about feminism and psychology and local politics and so on, but most people then were not publishing. I was also strangely able to rise within the discipline despite being such an undisciplined author within psychology.

Lois: Yeah, so a bit of both there, almost. Interesting, so at what stage then did feminism start appearing to you, or when you started identifying with feminism maybe?

Lynne: Well, really I started identifying with feminism as soon as I arrived in the UK, and that was because I was very quickly a single mother with a young baby. We were setting up nurseries that, you know, collective nurseries actually. I worked at a local nursery one day a week, one that local mothers had set up. Also, the story you hear about '70s feminism is that we were very anti-motherhood, whereas the reality is many people who became feminists in the 1970s such as Mica Nava and Sue O'Sullivan and Sheila Rowbotham were in fact mothers. Sheila has written mothers were the sort of



heroines of women's liberation, a bit like the workers for Marxists, and this is totally written out of our history, or denied as if we were anti-feminists. Sadly I think the situation for mothers has got tougher and tougher today. There's so much individualism at large, and the idea that we should in our communities be setting up nurseries and collectively looking after children, asking for money for day centres and nurseries and so on, that whole tradition has sort of almost died away, at least in the inner cities. Being a single mother from late 1969, I was always engaged in feminism, setting up a women's centre in Islington, going into schools to try and help, going to nurseries to help unionise the workers there, because care workers then and now are still so exploited. Going into schools to talk about feminism and sexism and the world we wanted, and so on. It was an incredibly exciting period, as I'm sure anyone you've talked to who was a feminist in the 1970s will say to you.

[0:14:07]

Lois: It sounds amazing, wish I was there. Can you talk a bit about how then your work and feminism came together, and how it influenced your work going forwards?

Lynne: I was a socialist feminist; most feminists were socialists in those days, or came out of the left. As we tried to understand why women were marginalised and secondary within culture, within politics and so on, we tended focus in on the family and women's role as carers and mothers within the family, and how that kept us more marginalised within the world at large. The very first book I edited in 1983 was called *What is to be Done About the Family?* I had various people talking about the problems of how it was double workloads, it was the care, it was women's role as carers that put so many burdens and constraints on women. Not that we wanted to give up our caring roles, but we thought there should be more public support for carers on the one hand, but also of course we questioned the biological reductionism around the way in which psychology for instance looked at sex differences, where you're always looking for the differences and not noticing the overwhelming similarity between men and women. Involving men in childcare, involving men in housework and so on was very important for us '70s feminists, but also tied in then with what I was interested in writing about and talking about. Sexuality of course was another key issue that I taught and wrote about, in terms of the idea that women were passive in sex. As we now read people like Judith Butler writing that it's that basic heterosexual matrix of the active man and the passive women in sexual engagement that we wanted to challenge. After I had edited *What is to be Done About the Family?*, I then wrote my first single monograph, which was *Is the Future Female?*. In which I'm criticising the separation of the worlds of women and the worlds of men, something which by the way evolutionary psychologists like to emphasise, and saying no, the future isn't female, but hopefully feminism will play a significant part in that. I engaged with but critiqued some of the cultural feminism which was insisting more on the differences between men and women, although tending to see them as culturally acquired, and I was saying it's always more complicated than that. I would be reading, as I said, people like Stuart Hall and saying no, consciousness comes out of culture, out of language. You can't just talk about the individual, and we know that the individual is the basic unit of study in psychology, without thinking of what is behind the formation of individuals, culture, language, distinct conditions. As we know, race and ethnicity and so on would quickly come to play a larger part within feminism, and hopefully I was reflecting that in some of my writing. After *Is the Future Female?*, I wrote a book on masculinity called *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*, because I didn't like what was happening not so much in psychology but within feminism. We seemed to be once again back to these two worlds of men and women, with women as virtuous and men as ineluctably aggressive and predatory. I disagreed with that and I also tried to talk about gay and lesbian existence, saying nobody just fits neatly into the slots in which individuals are placed. Then I also wrote a book on sexuality along the same lines, *Straight Sex*, something about the pleasures of heterosexuality. I can't remember what it's subtitle is now. The politics of sexuality, in which again I'm unpacking the sort of polarised world between men and women, and saying there are ways we can come together despite the realities of exploitation of women at work, of violence towards women, often in domestic situations and in the world at large and so on. That's what I began writing about, at the same time as I was always absolutely engaged in local activities. I mentioned the women's centre, but also we had a local alternative paper that I was engaged in, the *Islington Gutter Press*, which I helped to produce. There was always this wonderful connection between what I was teaching, I mean wonderful for me to be able to link things up, what I was teaching and my political and social engagements. You could really live your politics in those days, in ways which could also have its problems. It sounds quite utopian in some ways, but as we know, you don't just need to be

in a laboratory to see how one person influences another in terms of how long the lines are. Some people for all sorts of reasons will be able to be more assertive than others, and so the tensions within feminism around the power relations between women kept coming more and more to the fore. By the close of the '70s, that was very evident, and evident in magazines like *Spare Rib*, for instance, or *Red Rag*, both of which I had some connection to. I was on *Red Rag* for a while and I often wrote for *Spare Rib*. Feminism was finding it hard to deal with different power relations between women, because as different groups are fighting for their own voice and their own presence, then that does create significant tensions, sadly.

[0:21:22]

Lois: Yeah, absolutely. I was actually going to ask that in terms of when you were writing *Is the Future Female?*, because I think some of those ideas were perhaps, as you touched on, a bit different to other feminist writers at that time. How was that experience for you? What was that like maybe writing something that was a bit different and new in terms of those ideas?

Lynne: Happily for me, I was always very embedded in local politics, and in socialist feminist politics. I was friendly with many people who were also becoming better known as writers and so on. First of all Sheila Rowbotham, who became one of my first good friends and remains a friend today. There were always a number of us both wanting to spread feminist ideas, different ways of understanding men and women and relations between men and women, and of course working for radical equality between people, trying to improve our communities to make them more women and children friendly. It's true that I would get criticised, especially as there was a stronger radical feminist voice by the close of the 1970s, and the particular issues that they were dealing with, which was very much to prioritise men's violence against women. Now, men's violence against women was and remains a huge issue locally, nationally and globally, but it wasn't the only issue in relations between men and women. We did have men as fathers of our children, as care workers and so on. While I would get criticised for being soft on men; I was once at a swimming pool, at my local pool in Highbury and I'm swimming away, and suddenly the lifesaver person looking after everyone called out, 'Are you Lynne Segal?' Yes, I say. 'You're too soft on men!', he says, and he's studying psychology at Essex.

Lois: Oh my God, how bizarre.

Lynne: Yeah, imagine that, so men who were critical of me. By this time there were men's groups and so on. There was the journal *Achilles Heel*, very much wanting to support feminism, reading the most popular feminists. By the close of the '70s, some of the most popular feminist voices were Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, both in the States, who got more and more single issue, men's violence against women is the problem and pornography is the cause of men's violence against women. Forget the fact that significant amounts of violence against women were in countries that did not have easy access to pornography, and many of those people who have often been jailed for rape, given the unfairness of our trials etc., were often particular men who didn't have much access to pornography compared to other men and so on. I was always against reductive thinking wherever it was coming from, whether it was from the left or whether in feminism and so on. I did get criticised, but then I always had solid support groups behind me, and other people who would agree with me and so on. They were just exciting times, as I said.

Lois: Yeah, definitely, that's so interesting. I suppose moving on, thinking about support groups and stuff like that, and you saying that you were and are probably quite involved with feminist activism then within your career. Can you tell me a bit about that and maybe a bit about your involvement with POWES [Psychology of Women and Equalities Section of the British Psychological Society] as well as a feminist organisation?

Lynne: It's interesting, because I did always prioritise my community activism and I suppose being part of the radical movement socially, I tended not to be at the forefront of organising within academia. I was organising outside, so the first I knew about POWES was being approached by others, sometimes in fact by students, or indeed doctoral students such as Catherine Johnson, who became very involved in POWES and said, 'You must come along and talk about whatever, masculinity or violence'. The interesting thing is because of my political engagements and always wanting to be rooted where I was, I'm always frightened of feeling rootless. I was rooting myself in community



politics, and then I would be invited to do things within POWES. I stayed at Enfield into Middlesex for around 30 years, and then I only had one other job, which is interesting, isn't it? Most people nowadays would have more than two jobs, and I had that job because I was invited to apply for an anniversary professorship at Birkbeck, otherwise I probably wouldn't even have moved. Then I was really lucky, because I always thought I wouldn't ever get a job in a mainstream psychology department, because I certainly was not publishing in psychology journals. Although those who marked my doctorate had been connected to top psychology journals, that's not where I published. I would much more likely be publishing just in local magazines or journals. I was on *Feminist Review*, so I would publish in *Feminist Review*. I would publish at times in *Spare Rib* while it was still going, it closed in the 1980s. Sometimes in *New Left Review* and so on, but in terms of my journal footprint, it was pretty negligible. Other people would approach me I suppose more as a public figure, and that's how I got the job at Birkbeck. They were celebrating 175 years of Birkbeck as a, it was called originally a working men's university; a working people's university in 1999, and that's when I got the job there. They're about to celebrate their 200 years actually, but they were looking for more of a public intellectual. I suppose in a way it's an interesting concept, the public intellectual, isn't it? One that sounds rather grand and certainly rather male, as anything too public does. I had a certain presence there. My books would get reviewed in *The Guardian*, for instance, or *New Statesman*. That gave me a certain media clout that meant that I got the job at Birkbeck. I think I very much appreciated the work that other women were doing in setting up POWES, and I did speak there many times, but I would never have been one of the organisers of the conference. I was the one just pleased that it was there. What I saw in my career, I think I mentioned, was when I began teaching in 1970 I thought there were about equal numbers of men and women studying psychology. Then the big change in academia as more and more people are going to universities is that there's more and more women. By the end of my career, it was so overwhelmingly women who were studying psychology, and I think that's for better and for worse. It's because everything now is so career related, instrumentalised, universities being more commodified, subjects must relate to output in terms of income earned. That is such a crazy idea for me, you study for its own sake. What we get now is this terrible attack on the humanities, and psychology for me is very much a part of the humanities, placing people in their context and looking at the inequalities and difficulties which people face within the social world. Of course psychology, as we know, even today although it has been altered through the struggles of women and Black people and ethnic minorities, it still likes to think of, it still has this science envy which people like Michael Billig and other people have written about. They still like to think that they're with these hard facts of the brain, so neuropsychology is seen as very significant, even though actually there's no story about the functioning of the brain except the cultural story we attach to it, and so on with evolutionary psychology. The pretence is that we've got back to the genes and what they do; actually know next to nothing about genes and what they do in terms of complex human behaviour, but psychologists still seem to be rather mystified by what they imagine science to be. I've always been someone trying to hang on, get back to social reality and all its complexities.

[0:32:24]

Lois: Absolutely, sometimes those complexities I suppose are harder to grasp on to rather than the genes and the brain maybe. How was maybe the involvement with POWES or any other kind of feminist organisation? Was that important during your career in your work in any way, do you think?

Lynne: I think it was just very nice to be, because my teaching and writing was always quintessentially interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary you might say, drawing on different disciplines. I think for POWES that was also the case. I can remember being on platforms with Johnny Lewandowski, who was in politics, and other people who were in sociology. Opening out voices, opening out psychology to embrace intellectual life more generally, is what I see POWES as representing, and what I think should be celebrated. I did feel grateful that I had platforms there, and it probably helped me to be more recognised within psychology because actually in 1999 when I was asked to apply for the job at Birkbeck, it was because I had been linked to a particular degree there, an MA in gender, culture and society. They had suggested I apply, and that had actually come out of English and humanities at Birkbeck, which was really more a place where I felt at home. Anyway, I happen to know, I've been told the story that the vice-chancellor, then called the master at Birkbeck went along to tell people, 'We're going to appoint these half a dozen people,' or something, as the public face of Birkbeck. He went to English, they were very happy to suggest me, and then he went to the



psychology department and said, 'Who would you suggest as a public face?' They were all like, 'Oh, I don't know,' and so he actually said, 'I've been told, 'What about Lynne Segal?' I don't know exactly how he knew about me, because I think he was a chemist or something, and they said, 'Who? We've never heard of her,' but there was one person there, Stephen Frosh, who had certainly heard of me because I often shared platforms with him, sometimes at POWES actually, nationally and internationally, because of course international is hugely important. He said, 'Oh yes, I know Lynne Segal. I was at a conference with her in Sydney just recently, she's great'. It was more I would get more pulled into psychology through my writing. I got appointed to be half in psychology and half in English and humanities, which was a wonderful place for me to be. Meeting people like Stephen through POWES, who was doing very similar things to me; slightly more psychoanalytic, but as I say, I've always been interested in Freud and psychoanalysis and mental states and so on, which psychologists are still a bit wary of, to this day, outside of psychoanalysis. That was a perfect place for me, until I actually came up to what was then compulsory retirement age. I turned 65 I think the year before the laws changed around compulsory retirement, and at that time we were setting up, it would have been in 2009, we were setting up psychosocial studies at Birkbeck, with Stephen Frosh heading it up. Stephen said, 'We have to buy back Lynne,' and so psychosocial studies was again exactly the home for me. Psychosocial studies is only emerging really, isn't it, in the 21st century. That was my home and remains my home, psychosocial studies. I'm interested in the psychic and the social and the place of the individual within it. I feel I've always been lucky in terms of being able to be a part of changes that are happening, but many other people also very much pushing those changes, with POWES but also the journal *Feminism and Psychology* that got set up. I often feel I am slightly on the border, you know, this absolute definite transdisciplinary scholar, transdisciplinary political scholar. Things like POWES are crucial in giving a space to people like me.

[0:37:49]

Lois: That's really interesting, and good to know, lovely. Do you think that POWES has developed over the years, and do you think it should continue to develop along a particular path or anything like that?

Lynne: Another thing that's very important about POWES is it's not just interdisciplinary, but it's very international, isn't it? I've been to conferences in Spain and Portugal, and you're meeting people from everywhere. I suppose that's true of the BPS [British Psychological Society] in general, but I think for women in psychology, we have needed together to be promoting our voices, rethinking gender, rethinking class, rethinking ethnicity. All this endless rethinking, rather than here's the basic facts, you get them through the brain or you get them through our evolutionary history. All this to me is sort of silly. It's just plain silly, because it's always far too reductive. The power of women, I suppose some people might say that from the 1990s with poststructuralism and so-called postmodernism, whatever that is, building from poststructuralism and the turn to language and the questioning of everything now. That's where I've always fitted in, the questioning of everything, the questioning of certainty. That's meant to be the essence of postmodernism, I guess, the questioning of certainty, the embrace of complexity. Psychology is no one thing and women are no one thing, but that's something which I think POWES has very much recognised. It's interesting, has there ever been pressure to change the psychology of women to - I don't think it's necessary actually. I wonder, you know, there's so much for instance dispute around trans issues now and so on, is this essentialising women? It seems to me one is always beginning from exploring the complexities of those identifying as women, so I don't see a problem really. Has it ever come up as a problem?

Lois: In POWES?

Lynne: Yeah.

Lois: I think POWES is trying to be a bit more openly trans inclusive, I would say, and try and be supportive in that sense. I think we're trying to do a bit more of that.

Lynne: There's this pretence, isn't there, that trans women sort of undermine the whole category of women, and yet I think, well, you know, that's really what feminism was doing. We were undermining what was seen as the essential nature of women, saying there is no essential nature of women. Which doesn't mean that gender and sexual difference isn't still the identity that is given most force within



society, for better and for worse. Traditionally for women for worse, because it meant restricting women to only certain roles and so on, managing to exclude them from public life.

[0:41:38]

Lois: That's such a good point, absolutely. Okay, so talking a bit more broadly then in terms of feminism and psychology, what impact do you think feminists have made in psychology so far, and what do you think remains maybe to be accomplished?

Lynne: Our battles are eternal really, aren't they? I think feminism has made a huge difference. I don't think anyone is thinking that measuring sex differences is all you need to know about men and women in the world today, and ignoring all the similarities and only focusing on the differences, as was the habitual move within psychology. That was mainly criticised outside psychology, wasn't it, by Raewyn Connell in her book on gender and power, or as I said, Anne Fausto-Sterling, the American feminist biologist and so on. We win certain battles in talking about the complexity of identities, the instability of identities, the fact that identities never exist outside of the social domain. Culture is always there, even affecting the womb. Whether babies are going to survive birth is very much affected by issues of poverty and class, which interact with histories of race and so on. That's what we've fed in, this notion of the individual. Even social psychology, as I said, was the study of individuals, how one individual affects another individual. That notion is silly, and yet within psychology they never want to move too far away from it. They want to find ways of thinking that somehow we're born to be, either through our genes, our evolutionary history or something in male or female brains that are what largely determines our fate. Whereas the battle that goes on within psychology is that what largely determines our fate is never any one thing. Now of course there's the whole issue of the environment, and women have always been very engaged with thinking about our relationships to the environment. One thing that has always been the case, you could go right back to Susan Griffin writing in the '70s; I don't tend to always agree with her, but nevertheless in her *Women and Nature* she's saying that women, like nature, that is the physical and natural world, have always been somehow seen as secondary and something for man to use. This issue of nature was always crucial for feminists in rejecting the idea that women and men are somehow decreed to be certain ways by nature. Now of course it's all back with quite a new force in terms of how we sustain the world and the idea that women have always been the ones, or the first in line to try and care about the world around them, and what we now know to be the deterioration of the world around us. The levels of pollution, the shrinking of biodiversity, the shrinking of forests, the rising sea levels. These are some things that don't sound like psychology, do they, but psychologists and particularly I think feminists in psychology, but psychologists in general now need not just to see that as individuals we're always socially embedded, but we're not just socially embedded in human relations, we're socially embedded in planetary relations as well, and so we had better work out how to preserve the planet. I imagine that that is going to be one big area for POWES to be engaged in, in a way that might be slightly new. I don't know what you think about that... obviously eco-socialism and things like that.

Lois: Yeah, that's really interesting. I agree.

Lynne: Another reason that eco-socialism or environmentalism or sustainability is interesting is because some of the voices there, and that probably does go a little back to Susan Griffin, tended to make women the natural caretakers of everything, so the natural caretakers of the world. Sometimes there would be an essentialism creeping into ecology and eco-socialism and so on, environmentalism, that again feminists want to say, wait a minute. We're all here to look after each other and look after the planet. This is a really challenging thing to be thinking about, now that we know the main cause of the threats to our environmental ecostructure come from burning coal and oil and so on. How do we actually get healthy, green alternatives without handing power over to the corporations to only think about how to increase profits? How do we actually relate to the world in a way that helps us create better societies? It takes us right back to William Morris and other people in the 19th century who were actually very concerned about this, and pointing out that profits and the market are going to destroy us all if we allow our cities to destroy the countryside. Of course, that is what we've seen with the huge deforestation, not just in Brazil but all sorts of places, but also here. How we preserve the environment for us, for future generations. Has POWES done much work on that now? I think they are doing more, aren't they?

[0:48:53]

Lois: Yeah, I think so. I think people are starting to look a bit more at that, but yeah, it's definitely an interesting topic, isn't it?

Lynne: All your other issues, as I said, around motherhood and poverty, exclusion, the effects of war, the effects of trauma. These are all things that if you just focus on the individual, you're not thinking of this wider world and the destructive forces that we're all going to be facing, half of us.

Lois: Yeah, that's important, isn't it? Okay, so what advice, then, might you give to feminists or activists entering into psychology now?

Lynne: My advice would be don't ever expect simple answers, to always be prepared to embrace complexity. To always see that we are never outside of culture, we're never outside of the social, and yet each individual is unique and we all do have a very particular psychological history that we're probably never going to get to the bottom of understanding. Whichever areas we go in that we want to work in, whether it's more around, you know, it might be around education, it might be around so many different things. Always a psychologist should be having a lot to say as to what keeps people sane. That's the other thing we haven't discussed. I didn't talk about mental illness, I always wrote on and spoke on mental health and mental illness, because of course the people we were reading back in the '60s when I was a radical student were RD Laing and of course Fanon, who I mentioned before, who was a psychiatrist. What we read about every day actually are rising levels of mental stress, rising levels of depression, and then we have to relate that to the whole rise of the pharmaceutical industry to dominate so much and are always there with their product to supposedly sort out our mental health problems, when in fact isolation and loneliness are some of the main causes of people's distress. For instance, I'm now engaged in a project on solitude and diversity that's headed up by the historian Barbara Taylor. Everyone can enjoy and cherish their solitude, but we can only enjoy and cherish our solitude if the world outside doesn't feel threatening. We can just be on our own and doing what we want to, but know there is a caring world outside, there are people we can relate to. If there isn't, then you have loneliness. Donald Winnicott talked about a child who is lonely, who doesn't feel that there is the caring mother, the caring person, the caring planet outside. That is the most desperate and terrible state. It's barely worth living, and so that I think is a very crucial issue, thinking about isolation, loneliness. We should all be entitled to a healthy solitude, and you can only have a healthy solitude in a caring world. That's a crucial psychological issue.

Lois: Absolutely, and that comes into maybe your most recent book, the, oh, sorry...

Lynne: *The Care Manifesto*.

Lois: Yeah, everything about that. Do you want to tell me briefly about that work?

Lynne: I just did my first few books; my last few books, we could begin with what I wrote about aging when I started to become old myself in my late 60s. The thing about feminism is we begin with the slogan 'the personal is political', but also for socialist feminists the political is personal. We're not just interested in individuals and what they feel they want, but how people are cherished or else despised or rendered marginalised in the world. That's what I wrote about when I wrote about ageing, which was called *Out of Time: The Pleasures and Perils of Ageing*. It's how we don't turn older people into outsiders within, how we don't feel threatened by ageing. We're all going to age, so ageism, which is still widespread, is simply prejudice against ourselves in that every day we're getting older. That was the sort of thing I tried to say in *Out of Time*. In *Radical Happiness*, which was moments of collective joy, that again was celebrating that good times we can at least talk about and share with others. We can certainly enjoy being alone, as I said in solitude, but we need to be able to tell that story about ourselves and share those stories, share things that we see as good about being alive. For that, we need other people. We need those moments of collective joy, regaling each other about why life is worth living. Then I actually started a book, which I'm still working on, which at the moment I'm calling *Lean on Me*. Not lean in, like neoliberal feminism, Sheryl Sandberg was think about yourself. No, not lean in, and not just lean out, but lean together, act together. *Lean on Me* is let's act together, and I wanted to call it 'disavowals of dependency'. The fact that masculinity, and indeed



neoliberalism, is all about the individual and how we assert ourselves and benefit ourselves in the world. In fact, we are all dependent, and indeed those who are mature and more powerful are usually more dependent than anyone else, because they're being serviced by any number of people. Anyway, I'm still working on that book now, and I don't know exactly what it's going to be called, but it will be pursuing what I suppose now is my general theme in all my writing, which is how we need each other. We need to think also beyond our own immediate horizons for those who are suffering or in trouble elsewhere, because the world is so interconnected and it will affect us. The fact that the environmental destruction is hitting the poorer parts of the world, Pakistan and India and so on, first of all, also means it will be creating a flow of emigration. We could think about the situation of COVID, of course. Many of us have hoped that post-COVID we can think about the way in which we're all connected, and the fact that we don't just need to get individually vaccinated, we need to see the world as vaccinated, or the world as supported in fighting COVID. If we don't, then of course viruses do not respect national borders, obviously. Interconnection, working together, supporting each other, I guess that's what I hope my life and writing has been about.

[0:57:41]

Lois: Yeah, amazing. The book you're working on sounds great and I look forward to reading it, brilliant. Thank you for telling me a bit more about that. I think I've covered all the questions that I've got. Is there anything else that I haven't mentioned that maybe you would like to cover?

Lynne: No, I would just like to think that POWES will flourish and that feminism and psychology will flourish, but also that it will always stay open to be able to embrace whoever wants to engage with it, and above all embrace the complexity of things and the need for the comfort of things and so on.

Lois: Absolutely, that's really interesting. Just for the record, could you state your gender please?

Lynne: Yes, I've always seen myself as female and I've been treated as female.

Lois: Lovely, and also your place and date of birth.

Lynne: Yeah, I was born in Sydney on 29th March 1943, so I'm coming up to 80.

Lois: Lovely, and then also your occupation.

Lynne: I would say I'm a psychologist and a writer, and a political activist. As long as I can be, with the support of others.

[End of Transcript]