

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**

**Interview with Paula Nicolson**

*Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford & Kelli Vaughn-Blount  
Windsor, England  
July 15, 2010*

**When citing this interview, please use the following citation:**

Nicolson, P. (2010, July 15). Interview by A. Rutherford & K. Vaughn-Blount [Video Recording]. Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. Windsor, England.

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

Alexandra Rutherford, PhD  
Project Director, Psychology's Feminist Voices  
[alexr@yorku.ca](mailto:alexr@yorku.ca)

**©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2012**

**Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project**  
**Interview with Paula Nicolson**  
**Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford and Kelli Vaughn-Blount**  
**Cumberland Lodge in Windsor, England**  
**July 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

PN: Paula Nicholson, interview participant

AR: Alexandra Rutherford, interviewer

KV: Kelli Vaughn-Blount, interviewer

---

{CD 1 of 2}

PN – My name is Paula Nicolson. I was born in London [England] on the twenty-fourth of July, 1949 which makes me nearly sixty-one years old today.

AR – Great. The way we usually start is to have you tell us a little about the evolution of your feminist identity. How did you become a feminist?

PN – It's a good question. It's very difficult to answer that because when I was at school and while I was at university, although clearly there was a lot of feminism around, it certainly didn't hit me. I went briefly after the age of eleven to a girl's grammar school. It was really good and I did very well in it. My father was in the Royal Air Force and we moved to another place. I went to a co-educational grammar school. It was interesting, retrospectively, that I didn't do so well. I didn't come top in very much. Actually I saw my performance deteriorate. I do remember in those days it was very strange because when I went to this co-educational school I had to do needlework and cookery, whereas the boys did British Constitution which is, effectively, politics. I never understood that because I knew that that is what I would be good at and I was absolutely no good whatsoever at needlework. Cookery I actually enjoy now but then I didn't really want to do that. That was when I was thirteen and I had first started thinking that this was a bit strange, and I didn't understand why I was being made to do something, on a gender basis, that I actually wasn't very good at when I would have been really good at the other thing. I suppose I can trace it to then. I always liked doing the things that, apparently, boys did. I was always called a tomboy. I am talking now about growing up in the sixties.

Sometime later when I went to university, I did psychology then, and I think there were three women in the whole class. I think there was a female lecturer appointed halfway through my course. She didn't stay very long and I suspect she had a really hard time. Then afterwards, my daughter was born about three weeks after I had finished my undergraduate degree. Again it was really weird because we didn't have any money and my husband went out to work. I was supposed to clean the house and cook, not because he said so but because it was only fair that I was at home. I wasn't very good at that and didn't really enjoy it. In fact, he was also doing a teacher training course and I was writing his essays for him. I guess I wasn't supposed to say anything about that but it was some time ago so it doesn't really matter.

{3:39}

He was always very well aware that I wanted to be an academic and he always supported that. When my daughter was born I got really depressed. It was nothing to do with her and absolutely convinced, even today, that it had nothing to do with hormones, but it was because I was being put into this role where I didn't really exist anymore. Certainly I existed in the family, and I loved my family. I remember my mother-in-law who lived in Scotland, who I was very fond of, saying, when she introduced me someone, "This is Paula. She is a mother." In fact, my husband, said, "Actually she's going to be a psychologist and she's got a psychology degree." It was sort of strange, and I still wouldn't necessarily even know about feminist ideas or literature, formally. As I am trying to point out, it was always really uncomfortable with what it was that girls and women, and particularly mothers, were supposed to do.

About five or six year later I started my PhD, which was on post-natal depression, looking at it in a very radical way. I started off by using an objective measure, a survey, for the pilot study. I assumed I was going to develop it that way. What I found was that when I went into people's houses and talked to them, there were other things going on as well as just the data I was collecting. I decided that it would be useful to interview them in-depth. The London School of Economics [and Political Science], where I was doing my PhD, they said, "You're not really supposed to do that. I don't know..."

AR – Somehow that [interviewing] would be more intrusive?

PN – You just didn't do it then; you measured. People didn't really do qualitative research in.... I think probably 1980 was when I registered.

AR – Yes, '80 to '88, so really not done at that point.

PN – No, certainly not. In fact what I did was go back to phenomenological sociologists to get the ideas from and symbolic interactions. They were, and still are, considered sociology, although I wanted to look very much from the psychological point of view. So, for some time I really didn't fit in anywhere.

When I was doing my PhD, after two or three years, Sue Wilkinson who, I don't know if you've interviewed her or not, had organized a social psychology symposium at the annual British Psychological Society Social Psychology conference which happened to be in Oxford [England]. I thought, "That sounds interesting." It was the first thing I'd actually noticed at a conference for a long time that I had thought was interesting. I can't remember what it was about, but it was about women and the word "feminism" was in it. By then I think I knew what feminism was and considered myself to be one [a feminist].

{7:09}

We turned up for this [the symposium]. I can't remember why but the building was locked and I found myself talking to Sue Wilkinson and Alison Thomas, who now lives

near Vancouver [British Columbia, Canada]. I didn't know them before that, and we started talking. I'm not sure that Sue was, but Alison and I were more or less at the same stage of our PhD. We talked later about setting up, what we then called, "The Feminist Section of the British Psychological Society. I think Jane Ussher was there, but certainly Sue [Wilkinson], Alison [Thomas], myself and Jan Burns. Jan and Mathilda DeYong, who I think now calls herself Mathilda Itamar, We were sitting in the bar talking and I think Jan and Mat[hilda] had already run meetings elsewhere that I think I hadn't been to. We kept in touch. We had made inquiries with the British Psychological Society and I think we decided at some point after the next twelve months that "Feminist Section" wasn't the best title.

AR – Can you tell us a little about why that was decided?

PN – Oh, not for us but because of contacting the British Psychological Society. The answer was, "This is a serious, professional body that actually is objective and feminism doesn't sound objective." It was about science. Again, I can't exactly remember the details, but we came up with the "Psychology of Women Section". In the meantime I think Jan and Mat, in particular, and the rest of us joined in quite actively, had already got WIPS going, I don't know if you've already heard about WIPS; women in psychology. We ran a conference (I don't remember the year but I suspect you know it) in Brunel University in West London. We met regularly with great enthusiasm. We were very productive in terms of the decisions we made and lobbying the British Psychological Society and lobbying senior members of it, fellows, so that we could get signatures because that was the rule; to get a hundred fellows' signatures in order to set something up like this. Several of us, Jan, Alison, Jane, and myself, at least, were more or less at the same stage of doing our PhDs, so whereas I don't think any of us got support particularly for what we were doing from the organizations where we worked or who we were registered with, we got a lot of support from each other. I think Jan and Jane were sort of a year of Alison and myself and I remember they got theirs [their PhDs] about nine months before we did. It was really a life changing experience for us. It definitely was.

Here [Cumberland Lodge in Windsor, England], three years ago, we held the twentieth conference for the Psychology of Women's Section which was about twenty-one years since it had been approved by the British Psychological Society. I haven't always been totally proactive since, but for ten years I personally was involved in conferences, giving papers, organizing symposiums for the British Psychological Society, the more main events, and that has continued. I was Chair for a while. I think each one of us has been Chair for a while way back in the distant past.

{ 11:03 }

It was interesting yesterday talking to Jane when we were in Wendy's keynote speech. Jane said to me, "You know, I just don't recognize anyone. I don't know any of these people." I think that is quite interesting because I've been in England and have come to eighty percent of the conferences and I've recognized people. But what has always been interesting to me is that people don't actually know who I am, whereas ten years ago

everyone knew who I was. I wonder, and I will ask her again today whether people (well, now they've heard her paper) now know who Jane was in relation to this particular organization here at the moment; the Psychology of Women's 23<sup>rd</sup> Annual Conference. Everybody who was involved in setting it up, bar one [11:57], and I don't know what happened to her, but there was a woman called Marilyn Aikenhead, who was an occupational/organizational psychologist at Loughborough [University] twenty-five years ago. I saw her once on a train, but I don't know what happened to her after that. I certainly don't come across her name and I am interested in that sort of area of work. ... There was Jane, Jan, Sue, Alison, Mat, myself and Marilyn. I know Mat went off to train to be a clinical psychologist and kind of moved away. As did Jan and Jane, but Jan and Jane were more committed to what happened.

I think, as with many of these things, interestingly, there was a kind of falling-out because I think about two days after the BPS [British Psychological Society] actually rubber-stamped the Psychology of Women's Section, Sue announced that she had been having parallel meetings, you may have heard other versions of this, but to set up a journal, *Feminism & Psychology*, which I am pleased to say is still going strong. But one of the aims of the Psychology of Women's Section and our meetings had been to set up a journal. By the time we had gotten to that stage we were ready to, as we saw it, move on as a committee, there was a market for two journals in this area. That was very sad, but also I suspect very interesting and very typical and I think "water under the bridge", people forgive each other. But I think there are still various kinds of scars, which, in a way, are healed enough. I think that all sorts of relationships, I hate the phrase but, "move on", don't they?

I think what was so good when we were having the meetings. As I said, they were productive meetings, supporting each other, and actually moving forward. This is now the 23<sup>rd</sup> annual conference. It is amazing, really! The fact that nobody knows me or Jane is actually very good. It is a bit weird, but it is also very good. We did extremely well, but we had a great deal of fun. We were definitely friends and we stayed in each others' houses and we had the meetings in each others' houses. You can't expect that to go on.

Last night we were reminiscing about certain people and how they were much more fun in those days, that kind of thing, which I suppose is true for everybody who is young. Everybody says this is typical of women's groups, I believe because, as you know, working universities are "men's groups" and they are worse. But I remember going to another conference and said this through my teeth yesterday to Jane, "Do you remember the conference at," I won't say where, "where there were other people," who, some of them are very active and very talented, some of whom are here today, who actually started claiming that they had set up POWS [Psychology of Women Section] [laughs] so you may hear those stories too, but I don't think so. There are archives, or there will be, in the British Psychological Society somewhere. We, but it got labeled as "those women", were quite cautious not to "wash dirty linen in public", but years later working with men I know that they are vicious. They will stop at nothing to undermine each other, or will even stop more quickly to undermine women.

{15:57}

AR – Can you speak about any other changes that you’ve seen in the organization or even in feminist psychology more broadly over the past twenty years?

PN – One thing was, which my PhD was on, was post-natal depression. I remember writing up papers from it and writing the PhD itself and realizing that almost everything written about pregnancy and motherhood was... I am saying this carefully because there was stuff. Janet Sayers, for example, I don’t know if you have introduced her or interviewed her, but I helped edit a special issue of *Feminism & Psychology* not that long ago, about four or five years ago maybe, which was a sort of remembering Janet Sayers’ book. The name escapes me at the moment, but there is a whole set of articles about it.

AR – “Biological Politics”?

PN – That’s the one, yes, “Biological Politics”. I remember looking at and buying it as well when I was starting off doing my PhD. But there still wasn’t much about motherhood. It was somehow that in those days meant that, being a feminist, you actually didn’t think about being a woman and a mother because that was what women actually did. You thought about work and equality and other things. It was unusual to write about motherhood, not now, as I am sure you know. That is a major change.

A couple of years ago I had a grant to do some research on new generation of mothers, similar to the paper I have just been hearing; Harriet Gross’ paper on advice to mothers. We looked at two generations; the generation that would be my mother and the generation that is currently having children. This year, I published a paper when I also brought in my PhD data so we had three generations of mothers. That in itself was interesting, how motherhood has changed, but also how psychologists just didn’t write about it. Now I’ve got data that I can look at which is actually seen as important. When I was writing that paper, I was really amazed at how much is now written about motherhood by social psychologists and sociologists, in particular, and how the whole thing about motherhood is to do with the mother as a person who has her life. This relates to what Wendy Hollway and Wendy Stainton Rogers yesterday were both talking about: “As a mother, you are an autonomous woman. You actually think about your appearance. You think about returning to your job, probably a career.” Whereas when I was starting out in my writing and, as I said, was brought home to me when I was writing this paper recently, there wasn’t the literature and mothers were so different. I am conflating the two things but they are related. Now motherhood is central to feminist or gender research.

KV – I am curious because you mentioned your recent work and you had this article that just came out that got picked up quite a bit by the press. I was wondering not only has that changed in feminist research but the way it is publicly disseminated, and it seems that they really pieced-up and liked this research, at least from what I was reading at home, one telegraph article in particular, the idea that the women chose the mother over the science. That idea seemed to get played up a lot. Do you think that is something that

changed in the way that feminist research is disseminated to the public as well, and what you think about what they have done with yours?

{25:24}

PN – I’ll tell you what has changed. I haven’t seen everything that they have done with that, but one of the things that has changed is that, and I think everybody in this conference would be able to agree on at some level, is that the kind of work that feminists do is of great interest to at least half the population, whereas before you would get the wise male doctor talking about mothers in some objectified way. Now there are enough of us, women, and I think this is [20:57] credit as well as others, who are doing research on things that actually interest them. In fact, just before I came to the conference, I had an email from somebody I’ve known for a long time and she said that she’s become a mother and now she wants to start doing research on motherhood. She said, “It is about time. Like everybody else now, I want to do some research on something that actually affects me.” I think that that is what has changed. In terms of the way that was picked up, it was funny because our press officer at the university, and we’ve got a young female press officer who herself was interested in it, so she put it on the college website. She also sent out press releases. She was really pleased that it picked up. But it was the fact that they did pick up! She did tell me a couple of weeks ago that, often she’ll send something out and it won’t get picked up. So, there is something going on.

AR – It serves as a barometer of interest, right?

PN – Yeah.

KV – I would ask one thing really quick because it is kind of the same thing, kind of a public thing. You have a trend of working with companies and corporations.

PN – I haven’t done it in a while, but yeah.

KV – I was curious of how you got into that, especially because these aren’t the expert windows for the solicitor work. It looked like it was a really interesting impetus into this, and maybe you could talk about that and how you ended up working with these corporations.

PN – Well it is all serendipitous, really. The “expert witness” stuff was a friend of mine when I lived in Sheffield in the north of England, Kathleen Cox. She is a psychologist and she had a business, basically, and she knew my work. The “expert witness” was all about medical negligence in reproductive health. There were people who had a termination that didn’t work or had a termination and found themselves sterile or babies had died, and other things that had gone wrong [involving] medical negligence. I would interview the women and write a report. It was interesting and all of it was in my area of expertise. Do you want to ask about the pharmaceutical companies?

{23:31}

KV – Yes.

PN – When I was in Sheffield I worked at the School for Health and Related Research, it has now changed its name, but it was called “ScHARR” and it was a school for health and research. It has gotten bigger. I then was one of the only people who did qualitative research and I think for the same reasons, it goes back to the public domain. Again, they were women who worked originally, a woman Pat Branson who worked for Glaxo Wellcome, as it was then. She was looking for somebody who could do some research that they could then piggyback on some publicity. I have done stuff on chronic illness, really just focus groups and interviews with multiple sclerosis and chronic bronchitis, and my favourite is overactive bladder. Then she set up her own company and I often did things with her and more and more people do. It is a really good way to get research funded... I got publications, so I got paid something and was paid some money to actually resource the study as well without selling any pharmaceutical products. What they were then able to do was to say, “Look, this is what people who have chronic bronchitis say about their chronic illness.” So I wouldn’t say it was feminist but it was certainly to do with my expertise in qualitative research.

AR – You have written quite a bit about reflexivity and using interviews and the role of the interviewer as part of the research process. Also how typically the notion of being personally invested and interested in a topic means that you can’t be objective. You have argued very forcefully that that is just not true, but that it is not the right way to think about objectivity. Can you speak a bit about how you came to that position?

PN – I probably articulated it better much later. Almost everything that I have written since stems from my PhD, almost unsupervised because they didn’t really want me to do it. I was thinking, “Why am I interested in post-natal depression?” I deliberately set out to look at people’s experience of having babies through interviews, and I interviewed them four times; through pregnancy, one, three and twelve months after birth, I think it was, and looking at their lives. One of the things that came up, I think I have written about this, was people saying, “I was feeling absolutely terrible, but I knew you were coming today,” and that kind of thing. So ages ago, I started thinking about it.

Recently, in fact I just finished it, I was an investigator for a study of leadership in the National Health Service. We did an organizational climate survey, but most of what we did was ethnographic, storytelling interviews and focus groups. The three researchers would follow people around or sit in a ward or in an office and just observe. We would then talk about their field notes. Some of their backgrounds to ethnography tended to talk about the silent space that the researcher makes her notes in. I remember that and I thought it was quite interesting because what we used to do was have three researchers and she would come back with her notes and her opinions but we would then talk about them. I brought this into the report, but I think at least one of them is going to do their PhD based on it so she may take a difference stance on it.

{28:15}

This is not exactly what you asked, but one of the things that is coming out of the report, which came out because we did have long conversations about it, was the chapter one gender. This is no surprise, I'm sure, but women (I am sure it is true in Canada and the [United] States as well) are in many more senior positions now. I know you don't have a National Health Service in the same way that we do but it is not the only example of an organization, I'm sure. Many women now are in senior positions, I don't know what the proportion is, but they are senior managers, senior clinical managers and senior clinicians. It has changed a lot. I used to teach at a medical school and in the last ten to fifteen years it has changed a lot. They'll say, "We asked them," and in fact I did some of these interviews with the senior women. First of all, the reason I did the interviews with the senior women, often with one of the researchers, was because they [the senior women] were very rude to these three young, female researchers.

AR – Interesting.

PN – I said I would go along and do it, so we did them together. They, obviously not all in the same way and some of them were nicer than others, would say, "Gender is not a problem now." Then if you pushed them a bit further, "Well, there is quite a bit of testosterone about, but I can deal with that." Then there was one particular and wonderful interview we have with a man but one of the researchers, Rebecca, went to interview this man. The data is interesting but in the end, they [the researchers] had all left their phone numbers, he had phoned her up and asked her out. This is recent, and a fairly young man in a senior position in an organization that is supposed to be an equal opportunities employer and to make sure that women are in senior positions. He was saying, as a man, "I am trained. I have the right background. I have had the right schooling." He was being very honest. "I know I can do things so I've applied for jobs that I didn't have any experience for and I got them and I've done very well." Then he said in once case, "Have you met so-and-so," a woman, and Rebecca said, "I have tried to a couple of times but she cancelled her appointment, and I haven't managed to see her yet." He said, "Well, she's beautiful. She's typical for cancelling the appointment." I can't express it as well as it is in the interview. He was basically saying how she had slept all the way up the hierarchy. "She had been quite good at some things, but she and I fell out," which was fairly obvious later when he phone up Rebecca and asked her out.

Ten years ago, you'd have said, "Oh, you bastard." But now, this is somebody, a "new man" in an organization (I am repeating myself, but I feel quite strongly about it), who hasn't changed and has managed to somehow find his way up. He'd have, it is almost like a reversal, had to use women to do that because there are so many powerful senior women. So he would have had to have chatted his way up, he'd had to impress women on interview panels that he could do the job. I'm sure, whether they know it or not, these women would not have actually wanted to appoint someone who was as he clearly was, if you seen what I mean; he would have presented differently. Yet he still obviously sees women as commodities and sees women as not competent in their own right. It is in the report, but slightly more muted than that, but we made the point. Hopefully we will publish it when we get a chance to.

{32:08}

Going back to reflexivity, the whole team spent a lot of time talking about this and what it meant. I am not sure we got any further than what I have just told you. On one level nothing has changed. In one level, actually, organizations are much more pernicious because there is a belief that men now understand women's role and women's importance and women's authority. They [women] may have a different take on management. They may or may not be different styles, more feminine styles, but there is a sort of an accepted myth, I think, that organizations are better because leadership is distributed across these different people and different styles. I don't want to talk about universities, but they are worse than anything [Laughs].

AR – Can you speak a bit about your personal experience then as a professional woman who has attained a very high status in her profession? What have your experiences been when you've noted these changes in a way, we were talking a bit about this last night too, about how in some ways when you started out in this field there was a sense that you could speak out about these things? You have noticed that women don't seem to speak out as much.

PN – Well, not women.

AR – Anyone?

PN – Anyone, except for people of my generation. In 1996, I published my first book which was "Gender, Power and Organization [A Psychological Perspective]". Getting back to reflexivity, I remember thinking then about my experience. He wasn't my boss, but the man at the time who was of a senior position to me (he was a senior lecturer and I wasn't). He seemed to hate me and I never knew why because I was always very nice to him. I started thinking and theorizing about it. I hypothesized that if men are quite weak in the male domain, and he was, then they are not going to like women who don't appear to be [weak in their domain]. He would never argue with the managers (which we now call them but we didn't in those days), or the senior professors or heads of departments. But I would. I, as all the other people you have interviewed I'm sure, got to where I was and published as much as I did because I worked hard. But I did and I enjoy it still.

{34:43}

So I had started thinking about that. I haven't thought this through but there is something in this; the more bureaucratic organizations and universities, in particular, have become, then the more disempowered men there are around because they have to operate within the bureaucracy, and "women are uncontrollable". Someone was actually saying to me the other day, a female professor who is younger than me, "I am still not recognized and I am a professor. "A", "B" and "C", all men, have always been recognized." I was saying, "Well, female professors are not male professors. Female professors are female professors, and male professors are professors. Also, female professors are seen as uncontrollable." Not all of them, but in fact a lot of them, do very traditional work. This

particular person is fairly traditional in their work. There is something that really terrifies weak men about women who appear to be competent and who want to get into the same game as them. It goes back to the same man I was just talking about in the NHS [National Health Service]. They [men] don't want you on their pitch.

Where I used to work in Sheffield, I got promoted there. I was a lecturer when I got the job, and then I got Senior Lectureship, Readership and Chair. My boss, who was my age and male, he was really supportive of me right up to the last stage. There was a young man and myself who applied for Chair and this guy, Ron, came to see me and said, "There is really only one possibility. I think Paul's needs it [the position]." I said, "No! I am going to go for that too." I didn't get it, and this other guy got it. I then went straight to the human resources [department] and sat there and said, "I refuse to move until I see the treasurer of human resources." I am not sure I'd have the energy to do that now [smiles], but I was absolutely furious because I knew that my CV [Curriculum Vitae] was better than his. Then, then following year I got it [position of Chair]. At that point, Ron wouldn't speak to me. He did his best to undermine me. He caused my colleagues and I no end of trouble. It was just absolutely exhausting working there. As it happened, I wanted to come to London anyway because my family is here. It was time to move on so we moved down here.

There was something then that I didn't realize, and this is what I was telling you last night and actually don't argue about anymore. It is almost like, where I work now, which is not too far [points down the hall], it is a beautiful place and there are some lovely people and some really good work that goes on there. There were a lot of almost "walking corpses", a lot of old men, actually not as old as I am now, but they were kind of marginalized and not happy and bitter. People would say, "They have been trying to get rid of so-and-so for years." I didn't understand why there were so many people that they had been trying to get rid of for years, but they were all men, I have to say. Then the principal wanted to totally change the system, and I led a group of other male Heads of the department (because I was Head of the department at the time) against this. They tried to pull the rug out from under me and so on. My turn of being Head of department came to an end, and I must say I am really glad about it. But it was sort of acrimonious and I was attacked, and not supported by my male colleagues. As one of them said subsequently, "Well, we were right behind you." But literally what they meant was that they weren't right behind me in the sense of supporting, they were right behind me waiting to see what would happen.

AR – Cowering [Laughs].

{38:54}

PN – Cowering, but would have loved for our side of the argument to be won. In a sense it is because the principal subsequently had gotten sacked for corruption and god knows what. That is sort of another story because the bureaucratization of all organizations, but universities in particular, I don't know how much you know but the number of principals and vice-chancellors in this country who have just been removed over the last two years

is horrendous. They have mostly been removed because either their council or their governors are corrupt (in one case), or mostly because they have just been telling lies and massaging the figures. We are just about to have a new principal. There has been a sort of an interregnum and everybody is thinking, [Cringing] “What are they going to find?” Or worse, he’s not going to even look. It is not just my organization, it is all of them.

I think there is a generational thing of women who are my age who are used to asking questions and, as I said, all those “walking zombies” who actually aren’t as strong as women, who would ask questions. Then, I don’t know what happened, but they metaphorically had their knee caps bashed. Do you know what I mean? You could see these people. They were just crippled by whatever assault had been waged at them. I would really like to do a study about them because they had obviously dared to challenge the status quo. So there has been this weird thing, and I could go on for years about it but I won’t. It does actually interest me at the moment because I am doing this leadership research and I am really interested in that kind of thing.

AR – Right. One of the things that I think occasionally comes up in our interviews is the notion of how women academics and professionals, I mean, when you look at your CV you have gotten massive grants and you have done huge projects. How have you experienced navigating being such a busy and successful professional with your personal life?

PN – Where I think I am different from most people in my position is my daughter was born when I graduated. At the time, hence, my PhD, I was thinking, “Well my friends are doing all of these fascinating things and getting ahead with their careers.” Then ten to fifteen years later they all had children and were juggling their lives. My daughter, in that sense, is now in the same position. She has two children. The expectations on women are different now, as you know. If you like, she was off my hands. I did my PhD part time, and you can trace the fact that during the early years she was much more dependent. In fact, Jane [Ussher] and Jan Burns last night were talking about how they remember my daughter when she was sixteen (she is thirty-seven now) because that was when we were sorting out the POWS thing.

So I haven’t had the same problems [as other professional women] in that sense. My career took a while to take off, but that was fine. I can’t think of anything other than a “limp phrase” to say that Derry, my husband, has always been really supportive. In fact, at one point I remember lying on the bed saying, “I just really can’t hack doing this PhD.” He was saying, “You’ve got to do it, you’ve got to do it. You want to do it, you want to do it.” I wouldn’t have gone on [with my PhD] if we hadn’t had that conversation. There hasn’t been the sort of the tensions that a lot of my colleagues had because they had children later.

{42:51}

AR – Right, right. You mentioned the work that you are doing now on leadership, and I think I am not mixing this up, but you have also got a new book coming out or a book that had just come out?

PN – Literally, yes.

AR – Is it downstairs?

PN – It is just downstairs, yes. It came out about two weeks ago.

AR – Okay, because I looked for it in my library before I came and it wasn't there yet so I wasn't sure. How did that project come about?

PN – That was when I was in Sheffield. There is a date somewhere on there. It was a while ago, although not that long ago. Time just goes fast actually [Laughs].

AR – Yeah.

PN – It was possibly because I got the grant for that that I got the Chair which I got in 2001, towards the end of the 90's. I can't remember how it came about actually, or got a grant to do the study. Then the book isn't just about the study. Doing the study was interesting because it was a three year study in partnership with the Sheffield Domestic Abuse Forum and they couldn't have done it without someone to do the research and have employed people. The money went mostly to the university to employ people and so on. I remember the very first time I met this woman when I was getting the grant because I wrote the grant application and she was the partner to help with access. She said, "Oh, you are somebody senior in the university. I am not sure how well we are going to work together." I think I tried and I am sure I didn't do everything right. Anyway, she ended up being really hostile and said, "Research is a waste of money. We have got all these women who need all these things and you have just spent 200,000 on research." Well actually, I employed two women to do it. We went to give out paper at conferences and the woman actually thought this was a waste of money because they were academic conferences and a couple of times they were POWS conferences.

Last year at POWS I gave a paper based on that. Not in quite those terms but actually looking at why is it that feminist activists accuse psychologists of psychologizing. We talked about it a bit this morning.

AR – That real tension between the activists and the academy.

{45:31}

PN – Yeah. There was a woman last year who also gave a paper next to mine. She was very helpful. She was saying that she was completely torn because she was a psychotherapist working with abused women and most of the time she wanted to kill the men. I am not saying that I don't feel that, but she saw the damage. Her job was to repair the damage. She was a psychologist and she got accused by similar kinds of activists for trying to repair these things when [activists thought that] the money should be on resources to help women leave abusive men. It is kind of complicated. I did, in the

introduction to the book, try to say something about this and trying to make sense of it rather than just moan about it, which is kind of what I just did. It was frustrating.

AR – Definitely.

PN – I think that being a feminist, an academic, and doing reasonably well actually upsets an awful lot of people, including yourself, because you feel you have to justify it to yourself in certain ways. But also I think it stimulates various antagonisms from those men and from women who see themselves as feminists doing something more useful than being an academic.

AR – Right. That is interesting.

KV – I am curious about the follow-up on the abuse research because you have done this type of research before earlier in your career. There is a movement within women's studies that they often argue, "Why aren't we looking at the men, and how we fix the men instead of constantly trying to either save or fix the women in the situation?" I am curious about what your perspective was on that type of research or why you specifically focused on women in your study?

PN – Well, in some ways the women interest me more. If you take domestic violence or domestic abuse, in particular, most of the research and practice has been about the men, actually. It has been about the men, and then it has been about the effect of the men in the long term on women (such as reduced self-esteem). I have been particularly interested in the vulnerability some women who haven't been able to get out of histories of being abused as children, [women] who are ignored. This is a subsequent "feminist" struggle I have had in my own mind because we found out that there are several women who have had up to six abusive partners. So some women have difficulty leaving and then once they have left, they leave [for good], and that is a journey in and of itself. Some women then go and find another [abusive] man. I think the problem is patriarchy as well as poverty and social exclusion, you know, that "it is important to have a man," certainly for more heterosexual women, and particularly women who aren't given the opportunity to be independent because they are socially excluded. They are poor and they don't know anything differently, they haven't seen any different patterns. I think those women are, on the whole, ignored because they don't actually enable feminist activist organizations to demonstrate any success at all. But to basically answer your question, women are more interesting to me.

{49:23}

AR – Do you have any thoughts, as someone who has been involved in the field of feminist psychology for the past twenty or more years, about the current state of feminist psychology in terms of what it has accomplished and what you would like to see it do more of?

PN – Well, one thing is related to what I was saying earlier. It is so good to see so many people coming to a conference like this because they must think that feminist psychology is valuable in some way. In the past twenty years there have been so many PhD students who have actually done feminist research in psychology which is amazing and terrific.

It was interesting listening to Wendy Stainton Rogers because I thought, “I actually haven’t read most of this stuff,” and I think it is interesting that she is drawing on sociology and sociological philosophy to inform her ideas. That almost always happens because psychology is, I don’t know what it is like on the other side of the Atlantic [Ocean], but psychology has become more and more of sticking people in scanners (we talked all about that last night), and then you say, “I can find the bit of the brain that I can press and discover certain things.”

To get back to your question, I am much more interested now, and maybe other people are too, in psychoanalytic ideas. Wendy Hollway has managed to maintain that over course of her publishing career, as well as a sort of interest in the discourse of psychology. I think it [the state of feminist psychology] might go positively in that direction. So instead of Freud, for example, as being kind of whipping boy of straw man or whatever, I think one can actually say, “Okay, he and others were writing at the certain period of their time and there is a lot that we can get out of this to explain the psychology of women and men and gender relations, and that sort of thing.”

AR – What did kind of get you connected to psychoanalytic thinking? Or what motivated you to connect with that more?

PN – That is difficult to answer. In 1984, a colleague and I published a book; “Applied Psychology for Social Workers,” and it has since gone through three editions. The first one I was really antagonistic toward psychoanalytic ideas, and then I saw that as I wrote it each time it changed. I don’t know what actually started that.

AR – Right.

PN – Then recently I actually started a course at the Tavistock Centre in North London where they developed lots of psychoanalytic stuff on organizations. I think I just see that there is so much unconscious stuff around.

AR – It just seems relevant? It just seems like it is being enacted in people’s experiences?

PN – [Nods]

AR – Okay, okay.

{End of DVD 1 of 2}

PN – Now she is just about to become Chair of POWS.

AR – Okay. Christine...

PN – Horrocks. The reason I point her out is that she came into psychology late.

AR – Okay.

PN – She is just about to take over the Chair of POWS, but she is head of a psychology group in a larger department at Bradford University. She and a lot of her colleagues are here today. I think what might be interesting about Christine [Horrocks] is that she is taking over POWS but also that she wasn't a psychologist then. I guess she is in her early fifties, something like that. She might have an interesting take on it. I think she was in business before.

AR – Oh, interesting.

PN – Then she did a psychology degree, and she is both head of department and about to be Chair of POWS this afternoon I think.

AR – Okay, then passed the gavel, so to speak.

PN – Yeah, every two years, I think.

AR – Okay. One of the things you mentioned early in the interview was the absolute absence or paucity of qualitative methods when you started out. Maybe I shouldn't say qualitative methods, but interviewing, as a technique of doing research. You have made the interview method and qualitative analysis consistent parts of your research. What have been the major challenges of doing work that way and also then, more positively, what have been the benefits?

PN – The challenges initially, as I said, were that “You don't do that.” Then I remember after I had gotten my PhD, for the very first paper I tried to write on post-natal depression I had gotten, from someone I knew, I think it was twelve pages, single-spaced abuse. She was one of the reviewers. She actually named herself, and it was [saying], “This is not psychology. This is nonsense.” It really was quite upsetting, and I feel foolish now that I then didn't try to publish anything in a journal for quite some time after that. In fact, I think it was Jane [Ussher] who said that we should edit a couple of books together and I think she or somebody, I can't remember, one of the groups said, “If you are actually writing a chapter in a book, then you are not going to get that. You'll get supportive comments.” So it was quite some time before I tried to do another journal article. Now, as I tell you, I feel like such an idiot. And this woman, ten years ago, started doing qualitative research.

{3:03}

AR – Oh, wow! [Laughs]

PN – That was a real challenge, to actually think [that]. I always wanted to remain a psychologist. I think some of the people I know, Celia Kitzinger I am sure you know who she is, she works and has now for some time in the sociology department even though she is a psychology by background. There are two others like that who say that psychology isn't worth it. I take the view that I actually am a psychologist, and that is what I am interested in, and academic psychology departments may be absolutely ghastly (they are worse than they ever were), but that doesn't stop me from wanting to be a psychologist and publish as a psychologist. I don't know if that quite answers your question.

AR – Well, one of the things, of course, is that I don't do qualitative research, per say. But just the amount of time and resources that it takes to deal with complex material, have you felt that? You have been incredibly productive, so clearly if it has been a challenge, you have been able to surmount it [Laughs].

PN – That cuts both ways because yes, that's true, but on the other hand, it was only about eighteen months ago that I had actually reused some data from my PhD along with this other study so that I could get three generations of mothers. Listening to Wendy [Hollway]'s workshop yesterday, I was thinking, "I've got data on pregnant women from whenever it was, so I may want to relook at that."

AR – Right.

PN – At some point, before it becomes too long, I guess I am going to have to throw some of it away. But you do get huge amounts of data that you can look at. Also you can look at it historically. My friend and colleague, who is an oral historian and why I got involved in the other oral history project, and I looked at some of his data that he got which he didn't even analyze because the idea is that you enable people to be able to speak for themselves. We actually used some psychoanalytic ideas. It was about homeless men and looking at the fact that they are not full of bitterness and hatred necessarily, which is what the assumption is; old homeless men who abuse or have abused alcohol and drugs. Some of them actually were looking back on their lives feeling quite positive. That wasn't what he [the researcher] was doing. He was wanting to just record their experiences, whereas I was saying they were really psychological and really interesting. I forgot the other [question].

AR – It was just about how you have made qualitative research work.

PN – Yes, yes, that's right. What I was going to say was actually knowing an older historian and then thinking about some of my old data, which is actually historical data.

{6:08}

AR – Right, okay.

PN – That is where I was coming to.

AR – That actually allows you to analyze it in a different way than you might have at the time.

PN – Exactly, yeah.

AR – It kind of keeps on giving in a way, depending on what lens [you look through].

PN – Yeah, so it is complicated and it is hard work, but it is also very interesting.

AR – Yeah. Well, I just have one quick question. Do you have any advice that you would give to feminist women going into psychology today?

PN – I think the most important advice, and this applies to everybody, is to get a relationship with someone who can act as a coach or a mentor or both. It, usually, benefits the older person as well. I think that my isolation was potentially damaging. It was because of actually setting up POWS and, as I talked about the support we gave each other because we were all, even though they were mostly younger than me, more or less at the same stage of our careers and doing PhDs. That actually gave me a real push forward. It is very difficult for women if they are going to be in universities, and probably if they are going to be clinicians as well, not to be isolated because there are relatively fewer women and the more senior you get, the more isolated you become. But if you do have someone, and it can be a man, but somebody that you trust that actually respects your work and can be mentor. That is what I didn't have and don't have, so I think that is the most important thing anyone can do. It is hard work to do that, actually. Also people know if you are creeping around them. It has got to be genuine [Laughs].

AR – Definitely. Right. Is there anything we haven't covered? Obviously we have a limited time, but is there anything that we haven't talked about that you would like to contribute to the record at this point?

PN – No, I don't think so. Things change, fashions change, the students I have taught over the years have changed and their value systems have changed. But what hasn't changed is that, professionally, life is more complex for women both at home and at work. I have said this, but it must not be underestimated that just because there are more women in senior positions, it doesn't mean to say that they can't just be removed. I think Wendy [Hollway] was saying at the end of her talk yesterday that when the axe falls, it is going to be the women that get jettisoned, and don't feel too comfortable.

AR – Maybe that is a good place to end [Laughs].

{8:54}