Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Tania Israel

Interviewed by Alexandra Rutherford

Washington, DC

August 4, 2017

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AR: Alexandra Rutherford, Interviewer

TI: Tania Israel, Interview participant

AR: Ok great. Go ahead.

TI: I'm Tania Israel and I was born in Pomona, California in 1966.

AR: Excellent, thanks so much. I am so excited to be having a conversation with you. I'm going to start by asking you a question that we ask of almost all of our interview participants on this project and it'll just be kind of the gateway to the much wider ranging conversation. Can you start by telling us a little bit about your relationship to feminism?

TI; Yes. Should I look at you or the camera?

AR: You should look at the camera and I will try to sit right here too so you are doing both at the same time.

TI: I stumbled into feminism in my freshman year of college. A friend of mine had taken this class called Psychology of Women with Michelle Fine and said, "you should take this class." Well it was a graduate class, and I was a freshman at college, I don't know why he let me into the class, but it utterly changed my life. It changed my understanding of why people are the way they are, why things happen the way they happen. It gave me just a new lens to see everything and it set the trajectory for the rest of my life.

AR: Oh wow. Now this is taking it back a little bit, but do you remember the kinds of things she had you read, the kinds of conversations you had in that class?

TI: So, one of the things that I value so much about having learned feminism from Michelle Fine is that feminism to me has always been intersectional. It has always been about gender and race and class and ability and sexual orientation. So, when I've heard people critique feminism for not being those things, I can see how much of it isn't, but that was never my experience of feminism. My experience of feminism was so integrated and multi-dimensional.

So, I remember we had a project where we had to interview someone about their history – I can't remember all of the details of it – gosh what did we read in that class? It's such a great question. It was articles. It wasn't – oh no – we read bell hooks "Ain't I A Woman." 2:40

Yes, I remember that. And I remember that there was some work that she was doing around ability issues. Ash and Fine, Fine and Ash. Yeah, so I remember reading that and so there were just completely new ideas forming.

I knew I wanted to be a psychologist since I was 16. I took a psychology class in high school. And so, I went to Penn [University of Pennsylvania] because I wanted to study psychology, [and] because it was one of the top psych programs in the country. The psychology department [at Penn] did not inspire me. There were some very socio-biological perspectives, it was very research oriented, [and] I wanted to know how to help people. But then I took this class psych of women and I was like "this is it."

AR: Wow, a totally... as you say you had a different lens. That sounds so lucky because I think you allude to the kind of difficulties and critique that a lot of folks, especially women of color, have with feminism because of the kind of ways it has excluded their experience, in terms of liberal feminism there hasn't been a lot of inclusion of intersectionality and so on. So, its sounds like it was sort of in the water you drank at the very beginning, which is really lucky.

TI: I remember, I told someone once that I had my first women's studies class with Michelle Fine and they said "oh, mothers milk."

AR: So, you said that you knew you wanted to be a psychologist when you were 16. How did you know that or come to that?

TI: In high school there was an elective we could take in psychology, so I took this psychology class and I was like "oh this is what I want to do." And so, then I did that. And I didn't realize how unusual that is until much later when I was in graduate school and was learning about vocational psychology. And I realized that most people go through a lot of, you know, not sure what they want to do or changing their mind about things. And so, I had to learn it academically that most people meander a bit, because it was very clear to me. I was also the kind of person who all my friends would come and talk to and so I had some affinity for it, I think.

AR: Can you talk a little bit… I know you've written about this in various places but I'm curious again to have you talk a little bit about your upbringing and kind of the influence of your upbringing on some of the… you know, in terms of how you kind of view the world and your orientation to the world.

TI: Sure. So sometimes when I introduce myself I say "I'm a bi-racial, Asian-American, bi – sexual, Jewish, Buddhist, feminist." You know, so I've got all of these target identities, but I also have a lot of more privileged identities. I'm cis-gender, relatively light skinned, currently able-bodied, US-born citizen who grew up with economic and educational resources. And so, it's that mix of all of those things I feel like is important. But actually in some ways… In addition to that the context … I grew up in Charlottesville, Virginia., which is a southern college town. And it's a college town so it's got a little bit more of mixing of people and ideas and things, but you step outside Charlottesville and you're in rural Virginia. My family moved there in 1968, which is the year after the Loving v. Virginia decision, that got rid of anti- miscegenation laws and so a year before we moved there my parent's marriage would have been illegal. 6:38

AR: Wow.

TI: Yeah, I was two at the time. My sister was four so you know they already had kids, but this family would not have been recognized. My parents had gotten married in California before that. And my parents are academics, they met in graduate school, so I have all of that context as well that I'm steeped in.

AR: You've also written that they [your parents] were social justice activists as well.

TI: Yes, my parents were protesting the Vietnam war. They said, "Well we went and we were protesting in front of the White House, but we couldn't get arrested because you all were at home with the sitter"

(laughing)

TI: There would be fundraisers for the ACLU [American Civil Liberties Union] in our back yard, they [my parents] advocated for things within the school system, my mother was president of the PTA. There was a lot of advocacy. And at the same time my mother dropped out of graduate school to put my dad through graduate school. She was told there was no place for women in academia. This was in the 1950's and so there was awareness, particularly for my mother, about gender inequity.

I remember asking [my mother] when I was very young "Why do all the letters to you say Mrs. John Israel? Your name is Mary." So, there were things that just I think didn't make sense to me. But there were also things that I got from them [my parents] in terms of a social justice advocacy perspective.

AR: So, going back to the observation you made that your parents moved to Charlottesville just a couple of years after these anti–miscegenation laws were passed, do you have any early memories of what it was like to be a bi-racial child in Charlottesville, VA in the early 1970's?

TI: So, I remember coming home to my parents… Well because at home I didn't have any context for wondering about any of it. But when I went to school… So, Charlottesville is very black or white or it was when I was growing up there and large populations of both. So, I went to school and kids said, "What are you?' And I was like "What am I?" you know. So, I went home and I said to my parents "What am I? What do I tell people?" And they said, "You're half Chinese and half Jewish." So, I was like "ok, that's what I am." So, then I could go back and say, "I'm half Chinese and half Jewish." (laughing) And then it wasn't until I went to college, at an Ivy League university, when people were like "You can't be half Chinese and half Jewish, one is a nationality and one is a religion." So, I got pushback on that. And I finally came to decide that I can be whatever I want, this is my identity.

But it was interesting because I grew up in Charlottesville my whole life. So I had been there all this time, so I knew all the people. And so, I didn't get asked that much along the way, except when I started working at Mr. Donut, which was my first job. I remember that there would be all these people I would be interacting with who I didn't know in Charlottesville. And I started getting this question again, but I would get this question "Where are you from?" 9:50

And I was so not aware of what they were asking, because I had been in Charlottesville and I was like "I grew up here." And they said, "Oh, but where are your parents from?" I said, "Oh my father's from New York and my mother's from Pennsylvania." And they were like, "This is not the answer I'm looking for." (laughing) And I wasn't trying to be difficult, I just literally had no idea they were asking about my ethnic background, but I still get that question a lot. People ask me that all the time.

AR: So, you know when you were 16, after taking a psychology course, that this was definitely what you wanted to pursue. And you went to Penn and you got turned on…activated by taking the psych of women course, but then you did a master's in human sexuality education. Can you tell us a little bit about that trajectory in terms of your decision to do that?

TI: Absolutely. So, when I was in college I also became a peer health educator. I started doing contraceptive education and we were doing those things in the residence halls and I started doing that because a friend of mine was doing that and, so I met the other people who were doing that and that was great, it was a wonderful opportunity. It was really the vocational training that I got in college. In college, I learned how to write lots of papers and things like that, take tests. But where I learned how to do something that you might do in the work place was through that experience.

This was in the mid to late 80's that I was in college, so my senior year we actually had the very first AIDS awareness week on campus. I was part of that planning committee [and] I collaborated with Chris Lyman -- who was on staff at the student health center, she advised the peer health educators -- on the first HIV peer health curriculum on the campus. It was a certain time in HIV where college students were seeing themselves at risk, but it was ravaging gay and bi-sexual men's community. So, then I graduated from college and I had a double major, at that point, in psychology and women's studies and I had this experience as a peer health educator and I thought "Well do I want to do counselling? Do I want to do education?"

My first job was at the Cherry Hill Women's Center in Cherry Hill, NJ, and it's a reproductive health center and it does abortions and we were a training ground for Operation Rescue. It was very front-lines work and although I had a psychology major I didn't have any training in doing counseling. It was very stressful. I had supervision and everything, but it was emotionally difficult doing all of that and so I was glad that I was having that experience. I feel like I'm making a difference and I'm being helpful here, but I also feel like I'm dealing with the results of at least theoretically preventable problems. And I would like to be doing more of the prevention side. So, there was a job opening at the Red Cross, they got a grant to do HIV education in the Philadelphia suburbs, because people in the suburbs did not at all see HIV as their issue and the Red Cross was a perfect place to do that because they do the CPR training, and everybody trusts the Red Cross, they teach them how to swim and all these things. So, I got this job and I was like "ok well…" I was one of the few people who had experience developing HIV education curriculum at the time so I got the job and I was doing this and I was 21, like supervising all these people, it was ridiculous, but I was 21 so I had all the confidence in the world. But I also realized that it would be helpful if I knew a little bit more about how to do what I was doing. So, Penn had a master's degree in human sexuality education, so I decided 14:15

I would do that part time while I was working. I did most of it part time and then after a couple of years I quit my job at the Red Cross, I finished up my master's degree and then I went on to a job that combined these things where I was doing health education and counseling at the University of Virginia at the student health center - so I went back to Charlottesville for a few years.

AR: And then, of course you made the decision to go to grad school and get a Ph.D. So can you tell us a little bit about that process and how you ended up at Arizona?

TI: Absolutely. And I'm giving a lot of detail.

AR: It's good. Detail is what we want.

TI: I will tell you also, my father's a historian.

AR: Oh, how wonderful!

TI: However, the form of my rebellion was to never take a history class after high school. It's only recently that I've realized how interesting history is. So, I'm like "Oh, oh historians they like lots of detail".

AR: We do. Especially during oral history interviews. It's an opportunity to hear things that you might not otherwise know and obviously you've been interviewed before but add stuff that you might not have had a chance to write. I mean it's all good.

TI: Alright, Wonderful. So, when I was getting my master's in human sexuality education, I was a TA for a class, an undergraduate course on human sexuality, and I loved teaching, and teaching at the college level, and I was like "Oh, I want to do that." And the only way to do that is to get a Ph.D., but I didn't know what to get the Ph.D. in because I hadn't had this great experience in the psych department and all this stuff. But when I was getting my degree in human sexuality education I had to take some electives and I was in the school of education, so I chose these electives that turned out were counseling psychology, because they had a counseling psychology program there. And so, as soon as I did that I was like "Oh, this is my field." And so that's what I did. I decided at that point, I want to get a Ph.D. in counseling psychology.

I remember, I was in Philadelphia at the time, and I remember calling my parents and I was just talking to them about things and I said "Oh, I figured out sort of what I want to do. I want to get a Ph.D. in counseling psychology." And I wasn't going to do it right away, but I had sort of figured out the trajectory. I got off the phone with them, 10 minutes later I get a call from my grandmother congratulating me. (laughing) I come from a very academic family.

AR: Yes, she finally got it.

TI: There's a lot of support for going on for degrees in my family.

AR: That's funny. That's really funny.

17:07

AR: So, again lives are complicated and there's lots of other things going on simultaneously. And so at this point in your kind of development, where are you at in terms of your own sexual identity, your sexual orientation and kind of how that is unfolding?

TI: Absolutely, so I was heterosexual and I dated boys in high school and I had a boyfriend in college and all of this. And so, I hadn't ever questioned that. But, oh when I went to Penn, I came from again, Charlottesville, VA, kind of sheltered in this area. I didn't know anyone who was openly gay. I knew that some of my friends had gone to prom with guys who later came out as gay or bisexual. So, I knew it mostly from the side of supporting my friends through that, because that's a confusing experience for teenage girls to go through. And so, I went to Penn having had that experience and on my very first day of college I met this person Marc. We got along really well and I thought he was great, really fun. And then later on someone told me that he was gay and I was like "Oh that's so interesting." And the next time I saw him I said "Marc, I hear you're gay." And he said "Yes, I am." And I said "Oh, do they know what causes that?" I mean really, I said that. And he was brilliant, he said "No and they don't know what causes heterosexuality either." And I was like what an interesting way of thinking about it. I was kind of a naïve freshman, but I was also open to new ways of understanding things.

So, Marc became one of my closest friends, he lives in D.C now, I'm going to see him this weekend. And when I think about… I tell my students this story because I think I've pretty well established my cred, in terms of someone who does LGBT work. And so, I tell them that to say some people really are ignorant, they just don't know. And if we can be helpful and educational to them then that's doing them a service and sometimes they're really open to seeing things in a new way, but we've all made mistakes, we've made huge microaggressions, all of that stuff. But I'm so thankful that I had that experience that opened up my mind.

AR: What an amazing smart thing to be able to say and it sounds like in a fairly gentle way. It's an example for all of us who are trying to help people, well help ourselves see things differently, but also help students.

TI: But, it's not the end of my journey. So, then I met all the other gay men. It turned out that I had somehow moved into the dormitory that had a lot of, not just gay people in it, but also same sex couples, living together and so it was interesting. So, I suddenly had all of these … I was part of this community and they called me the fairy princess, which is nicer then some other things that we call people. So, it became part of my culture. I learned about gay culture, I learned how to read the ads in The Advocate.

TI: So, that was pretty much my experience in college. I was the fairy princess and lots of gay men. I knew some gay and bisexual women, some lesbian and bisexual women, but that wasn't as much my community as the gay and possibly bisexual men were. But I didn't know any men who were bisexually identified at the time.

So, when I was in the master's program in human sexuality education we had an assignment to write a coming out letter -- imagine you are lesbian, gay or bisexual and write a letter coming out to someone, you don't have to give it to them, but write this letter. So, I wrote this letter to my friend Marc about being bi-sexual and writing it made me go, huh, you know, I don't know that

I'm a zero on the Kinsey scale, so maybe it's not appropriate for me to describe myself as heterosexual. I've never been with a woman, it's not even something I fantasize about, but I can sort of imagine that the possibility could be there. It was a very cognitive process for me and I thought, alright well. And I started sitting with that and as I sat with that it seemed like "Ok well if I'm not a zero and I might be a one or a two on the Kinsey scale, how should I describe myself?" So, I started in my late early twenties, whatever time period that is, thinking about this and by my mid-twenties I thought bisexual could be the term that would best fit where I think I am on the Kinsey scale. So, then I would go to things, I would go to something where it was a bisexual gathering and I'd be like "I don't feel like I have anything in common with these people." I was sort of checking stuff out and I came out to some friends and these things, but it wasn't so thoroughly a part of my identity, until I went to the Association for Women in Psychology [AWP]

And I went to this conference that a social worker friend of mine told me about and at this point I was in grad school at Arizona State… Within AWP there's a bisexuality and sexual diversity caucus and it was right after that caucus had really done a push to get more programming on bisexuality in the conference. So, I go to this conference and there's tons of stuff on bisexuality and I was like "This is amazing." And I went to all these things and then I went to the caucus meeting and I go into this room and it's filled with bisexual feminist psychologists and I was like "These are my people." And it was never a question for me from that point, that was 25 years ago and I've identified as bisexual since then. I've had long-term relationships with women and men and all of that feels very comfortable to me. I came out to my family when I was in a long-term relationship with a man and they were like "Well why are you telling us this?" And I was like "Well I just want you to know me more fully" and they've been very accepting. They always try to treat my partners the same, no matter what gender they are.

AR: Can you speak a little bit… before I came I had the pleasure of watching your Ted Talk, the UCLA one, where you describe some of the critiques of bisexuality that actually kind of got you to think about things differently again. And can you talk a little bit about that? It was so useful. I mean I know you've talked about it in your Ted Talk. But I think it's such a compelling… I would like to hear you talk about it again. 26:13

TI: Absolutely. So, I identified as bisexual and that was just very comfortable for me. I wrote a piece, that I think I sent you, about being biracial and bisexual. I was asked to do that, to write that piece. And it's funny cause when I wrote that, I remember one of my colleagues who was reviewing my materials for tenure or something, she said "You're very brave" and I didn't feel brave. I didn't realize I was being brave. It's funny how once I identified that way it didn't faze me at all.

So then, more recently in the last few years, I had started to become aware of this critique of bisexuality, that it perpetuates gender dichotomy. Because it's the word bi, and bi means two and it's attraction to women and men and that's two and that's only two. And I was like "oh, oh I don't, that's not the way I see things, I don't mean to do that." And at the same time bisexuality still felt like the right label for me, it's a label I had had for many years at that point. And I'm going to say the other thing about it… so there's a lot that I didn't talk about in the Ted Talk

about this. And one of the things that I didn't say in there is bisexuality *is* radical. It's really radical, because it says gender doesn't have to be the most important characteristic and you don't have to be attracted to only one gender. And it's certainly no more dichotomous than being heterosexual or lesbian or gay is and yet it's getting this critique. And so, I actually think some of the critique is there's a bi-negativity about it, I think.

You know I think bisexual, transgender people and especially gender non-binary people are the most marginalized within LGBT communities and to pit them against each other is, I just think, tragic. Because I think they've not only got potential to be allies, there's been a lot of allyship in there, and so there's something about that critique. But at the same time that critique made me think more and think about what does this all mean and what is my view of gender that informs my sexual orientation? And I thought alright, well I think gender in multidimensional. I think it's not just one continuum, probably it's many. And my sexual orientation… I can say I'm bisexual, that doesn't mean I'm attracted to only men and women, its means I'm attracted to more then one gender. That's the way a lot of people define bisexuality, but I still want to keep this label. But maybe there's some other label that will describe the way I think about gender.

So that's where I came up with, actually I didn't even come up with this, I want to give credit. I went to dinner with my friends Roger Worthington and Rebecca Toporek and I was talking about this issue, and I said, "Well what am I going to call myself then? And how do I reconcile this thing of not wanting to be oppressive to transgender and gender non-binary people and at the same time maintaining this?" So, Roger was actually the one who first said the word "What about pisexual?" and I was like "Oh it's brilliant." Because it's infinite and it's complex and all of this. And that seemed like a way of being educational and a little light hearted and at the same time, being able to respond to this in some way that might broaden everybody's thinking.

AR: I think that's been an aspect of… as I've been reading your work something that I find very powerful is your insistence that we use the experiences of folks who have very complicated, intersectional kinds of identities to begin to interrogate what looks like the kind of taken for granted or the kind of mainstream. That those same kinds of questions that we ask of those folks, we should also be asking of everybody, really. 30:40

I wonder if you could sort of comment on that. How that kind of came to you in your in thinking? Or the kind of... how you kind of came to that?

TI: Well, bell hooks, *Feminism from Margin to Center*. That's what it is, it's about centering what's seen as being on the outside. And I gave last year at APA, the first invited talk on bisexuality that there's been. It was a packed house. It was amazing. I had no idea how people were going to respond to this. But that's what I talked about, I talked about bisexuality from margin to center. And when I think about centering bisexuality or centering any of these sorts of marginal experiences, you know being biracial, being transgender. Like if we bring being a person of color, bring any of it centrally in, and we say what if we viewed things through this lens? And what if we operated through the lens of this being normal and central? And then we start to do things in ways that help everyone.

AR: I have a number of different things percolating here, but maybe this would be a good time to have you speak a bit more about your own complexity, about the intersectionality of your own life and experience – biracial, bisexual and so on. And again, can you maybe just talk about how you've experienced that?

TI: Yeah, absolutely. Well like I said, early on people would say what are you, where are you from, things like that. But I didn't have such a strong identity as a person of color, as an Asian American, partially because in Charlottesville, VA there weren't many Asian Americans. There were a few Vietnamese refugees who had moved to town and that was sort of my only experience, and I was like, I don't feel like them. I've been here my whole life, it was like that doesn't fit quite right or feel like me. I also… my Chinese family was on the west coast, we only saw them occasionally. I had Jewish family in New York who we saw more frequently and I had cousins I was very close to there. So, I developed more of a Jewish identity even though I didn't grow up with any religious practices in the home or anything like that. So, there were those pieces, I had some awareness of those.

And then when I went to college and I took Michelle Fine's class, it's like the identity as a woman became very salient. Like you know how we talk about identity salience, that became my salient identity. I ended up doing my undergraduate thesis on street harassment with Michelle Fine, you know that was great. So, it was so much how I saw myself, how I experienced myself. I mean I would understand… I know I'm a person of color, I know I'm Asian American, but I mostly know that by how people react to me. And it wasn't sort of coming from internally what I was experiencing. Interestingly when I moved to Santa Barbara, I was aware that oh, there's lots more Asian Americans here. And people were like "Are you kidding Santa Barbara is so white." And it is compared to other places in California. but compared to… I had just moved there from Memphis, I grew up in Charlottesville and even Philadelphia… I didn't have much interaction with the Asian American community, so I didn't have those things around me. But I did start to develop those associations with what I would call my target identities more. And then once I identified as bisexual, then that also became very salient in my writing and my work.

I didn't start to develop an awareness of much of my privilege until much later, in the last, I would say in the last 10 or 15 years is really when that came up for me. 34:48

And there wasn't so much discussion at the time around privilege. If people are reading this much later on… Privilege right now… Everybody talks about privilege, so, it would be hard to not know about it. But, Peggy Macintosh had done her stuff, I had read that and so I had some awareness of those things. I think in Michelle's class there was some discussion of things like that. I wonder if we had read Peggy Macintosh then, because I know that I had read it early on.

But it hadn't really taken hold for me until I went to a workshop… There's a group in Santa Barbara, Just Communities, that does wonderful training on equity and diversity and they did this program on SES and economic privilege on a Saturday, all day, and I was like "That's how I'm going to go spend my Saturday" and I went to that. And there was this particular exercise that we did where we all stood in a row and held hands and it was the step-up step back, people might be familiar with this, and they would say things like "if your parents owned the home that you grew

up in, take a step forward" and I took a step forward. "If your family was ever using welfare or food stamps, public assistance, take a step back" and other people took a step back. And suddenly I'm reaching back with people on either side of me and then there's this question of "if you ever went to bed hungry, because there wasn't enough food in your home, take a step back" and I lost hold of the people next to me. And I really had this insight, because in my family there was always food, I mean there was enough food to feed an army, we would always say that. And my mother made healthy, varied meals from cultures all over the world and imagining these wonderful people who I'm spending the afternoon with, who were so smart and funny and we're just getting along so well, and to think that they didn't have enough to eat and to think about how their parents must have felt, not having enough to feed them. I couldn't imagine. I had never imagined that. And I became very aware of my privilege then. So, I started really reflecting on that more and on all the different types of privilege that I have and ended up when I became...

AR: I'm looking for a Kleenex

TI: There's tissues in the bathroom. It's like the fourth time I've cried at APA. (laughing)

TI: When I became president of Division 17, which is the Society of Counseling Psychology, and I got to choose a presidential initiative I decided to do it on exploring privilege. And what I found is that everyone said "Oh, that's so great that you're doing that, because *they* need to explore their privilege and *they* need to explore their privilege and they *need* to explore their privilege" and I was like I need to really lead by example here. My target identities are very obvious, I need to be very vocal and vulnerable about exploring *my* privilege. And so, we actually set up these group phone calls that people could join and there would be like four sessions and it was counseling psychologists talking to other counseling psychologists on the phone exploring their own privilege. And people still tell me… People come up to me and say, "Oh my gosh, I participated in those privilege conversations and they were so meaningful, they were life changing." Rebecca Toporek was the chair of the special task group on exploring privilege and she just set such a wonderful tone for people to be able to do those kinds of things. 39:04

When I gave my presidential address, I remember I said, "I am the first biracial, Asian American, bisexual, Jewish, Buddhist, feminist president of Division 17" and everybody cheered and they clapped. And I said, "and I'm also another relatively light skinned, cis-gender, currently able bodied" … all these things, and no one's cheering that, no one's going to be like "Yes!", you know. But I think people got that. We need spaces to talk about that and explore it, not cheer it. But we have a language for talking about oppression, we have communities and social groups and things and college majors to really understand things from that target identity perspective.

But trying to understand things from that privilege perspective, I hadn't had the resources for being able to do that until much later in my life. That's very much a focus that I have, is trying to help people to see that. And I think for people who are strongly identified with the targeted aspects of themselves, there are particular challenges in acknowledging privilege because we don't want it to take away from the work that we do around oppression. We don't want to take

away from the support that we get around our oppression and if we're not also recognizing our privilege then there are ways that we can do lots of harm to other people.

AR: I think that's a great way of framing it because I think there is some reluctance to engage in conversations around privilege, because the fear is but we should really still be focusing on oppression, right? And as you say, you can't not have the conversation because it breeds more problematic and harmful kinds of things in the future, I think that's a really good way of framing it. I know something that my students and I talk about a lot is how do you do this, but in a good way, right? I'm going to jump back to your biography a little bit and also talk more about your work, but I'm curious about your experience at ASU [Arizona State University], who did you study with there? And what was your dissertation on?

TI: Sure. So, I went to ASU. I was living in Virginia when I applied to graduate school and I wasn't connected to counseling psychologists, except a couple people who I had taken classes with at Penn. So, I was trying to decide and I chose on rather arbitrary ways, I was like "Ok it has to be an APA accredited program." … Peter Kuriloff was teaching at Penn and I took his group process class and an advanced class. So, he was the person who was advising me from afar. He said, "You want it to be APA accredited and a Ph. D, because you want to teach" and all these things. And so, I was like "ok." I didn't decide I was going to apply until late. And I was like I don't have a lot of time, so I'm going to apply to a few programs and if I don't get in to any then I'll apply again next year. So, I said I want it to be somewhere that I can focus on gender issues, that was one of my main things. And I wanted to be somewhere that's not cold, I don't want to live somewhere cold and maybe go somewhere I haven't lived before. And so, I applied to only a few programs, I applied to maybe three programs. And Arizona State had people who were doing stuff on gender issues, Barbara Kerr was there.

And I had worked at this camp for gifted children when I was in college and the director of the camp had said "You have to read this book called Smart Girls, Gifted Women" and so I had this book and then when I was looking through the faculty list at Arizona State, it said Barbara Kerr and I looked at my bookshelf and I was like that's her. And it was such a good book and it was like "oh, that would be really cool." And I thought ok there are people there who are doing this stuff, Bianca Bernstein was there, she was doing these things, Gail Hackett was there. There were very cool feminist psychologists who were there and I thought "Ok and it's warm" - I had no idea how warm.

So, I ended up there and I got to work with Barbara Kerr and Sharon Kurpius on the work… Sharon Kurpius Robinson, she was Robinson at the time. They were doing this work with at-risk gifted girls and I got to work on that project. And Gail Hackett would meet with her advisees on the weekends at her house and I had lots of friends and they said, "Come along," so I was kind of hanging out and then I was like "Wow," I feel like if she were my advisor I would really have to know my stuff because I was like she's good and she's rigorous and I could learn a lot from her. And so, I said, "I would love to be able to work with you" and she said, "Well I'm not taking any new advisees" and I said, "Well can I keep kind of hanging out" and she said "Sure." I broke her down. (laughing) Eventually she accepted me as her advisee and I was so happy that I got to

work with her, because I learned so much and I learned from every single person on the faculty there.

John Horan taught a research methods class, I learned about 2x2 designs and that's what I did for my dissertation. And so, for my dissertation… I was teaching in women's studies while I was in graduate school, so they actually gave me a half-time instructor position and that was an amazing opportunity. One, I love to teach and I got to develop my teaching. Two, it helped with the tuition because I was like on benefits. So that was great. Three, it gave me… I got to have that sort of feminist view while I was doing the psychology stuff and make sure that it was always the lens that I was using. In one of my classes, I had students do the coming out letter exercise that had been so influential for me and I got pushback from people. Because it was a large class that fulfilled one of the general education requirements. So, it wasn't just feminists who were taking this class, it was a very diverse group, which I love teaching that kind of diversity. So, I got some pushback and I was like "Ok, I should go see what the literature says about this exercise" because if I need to justify it, I want to make sure that I know what I'm doing. There's no literature on this exercise and I couldn't find very much at all on any kind of educational experiences on LGB -- and at the time we weren't talking about T so much -- it was really LGB issues. And I was like "Oh, well that would be an interesting thing to do my dissertation on." So, I went to Gail and I said, "You know I'd like to do something on diversity training and on testing out things." And she said, "Ok, well what do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, I'm particularly interested in the stuff on LGB issues" and she said, "Great, well you know you're studying counseling psychology, do you want to somehow connect it to that?"

And I decided to do my dissertation on training counselors to work with LGB clients and I ended up doing this 2x2 design, where I developed this 3-hour training in different versions. So, one version was providing information, one version was exploring attitudes, one version was both of those and one version was neither one of them, it was a control condition. And so, I did that, I recruited all these people. It was an incredibly complicated dissertation, because it wasn't one-on-one training it was like in classrooms with groups of people. So, I had classes in the social work school and the master's students, all over the place. So, I recruited people to do the training and you know all these things. They had to learn all the four kinds and meanwhile I'm packing and getting ready to go for internship. 47:56

I found that the participants who received information had more knowledge than the participants who hadn't received information. Ok, that seems like a no-brainer. The participants who explored their attitudes, reported less positive attitudes than the participants who hadn't explored their attitudes. And that was so interesting. So, like many dissertations it raised more questions then it answered. So, I learned about the 2x2 design, I learned about all these things from all these different people. But really that set the course for the rest of my career, on looking at counseling LGB and then T clients and training counselors and all these things.

But when I was trying to decide about my dissertation, I also said to Gail "If I do a dissertation on LGB issues am I ever going to get an academic position?" This conversation probably happened in 1996 or so, which was a very different era. It really was a question, like I really thought "maybe I'm not going to get a job." She said, "Well let's look at your CV so far, you've

got a master's in sex, you've been teaching in women's studies, and you just finished a qualitative study on female strippers -- you're already pretty much sunk so you might as well do what you want." (laughing)

AR: Go for broke.

TI: Exactly, go for broke. And I did. And the remarkable thing is very shortly after that people started to recognize that we needed this in our field. And I never could have anticipated what it's become, and how it's so integrated in. And it's how I've made a name for myself and I thought it was going to be maybe the thing to keep me from ever getting a job. So, you can't know these things, you can't know what's going to happen. But I'm so glad that I did what I wanted to do, that I got that guidance.

AR: Absolutely. I'm trying also to be a little bit conscious of time, we've been going for an hour. But I wanted to ask you about a couple of things that came up for me when I was reading some of the materials you sent, which thank you very much for doing that, that saved me a lot of time. But also, are just super interesting. One of things … this is a question that is related to counselling. There's a lot of talk, has been a lot of talk, for quite a while now about cultural competence and even cultural sensitivity and so on. There's been a lot of different ways of trying to position that. A lot of the times it seems to me - and I think you mentioned this too - that the assumption is that the therapist is kind of the unmarked category and the client is the one who you have to be cultural competent towards. But you had written that the ethnic identity, well the intersectional identity of the therapist, clearly has an influence on therapy too, and how do we understand better how to work with that in therapy? And I wonder if you could talk about your thoughts on that at the moment?

TI: Yeah, there's… as much as we need lots more work in multicultural counselling, most of the stuff in multicultural counselling is about white therapists working with clients of color, that's the main focus of it. And we need lots of that, so it's not that we don't need that, but there's not very much guidance for therapists of color on working with any kinds of clients and I think that's something that we really need, especially as we're trying to have more of a pipeline into our field of therapists of color. And the other thing is when therapists have… I mean there are things that are written about when there are ambiguities about therapists, or stuff has been written about therapists who are pregnant. And it's sort of like your clients are going to see this over the months and so when there's personal stuff that they're curious about or that you need to share with them in various ways. And so, there are questions that therapists get, that I've gotten about my ethnic background, about whether or not I'm married, about whether or not I have children. There are all these things and I remember in graduate school struggling with how do I answer this? And Chuck Claiborn was my supervisor at the time and he was very good in working with me, in terms of not just giving me an answer, of helping me to explore that and unpack it and what would be challenging about answering this question? That was really helpful, because I think identifying the things that feel like vulnerabilities... It's like I'm sharing a vulnerability with a client. If they say "What's your ethnic background?" and I have to sort of… now we're talking about these things that put me in a different kind of position with them. They are asking about sexual orientation, what do I share, what do I not share? Knowing how biased people are

against bisexuality, what do I share, even with lesbian and gay clients, there's biases. So, I don't have the answers. I don't know exactly, but I think we need a lot more work in that area because it puts us in a vulnerable position that if we haven't thought it through and if we haven't had supervision and guidance in it, it makes us less effective therapists. I think we always need to think about how we're there for our clients and that means we've got to be able to work with all of those things. I think that people are probably doing that better now in training, I don't practice now. I haven't seen a client since internship, but those early experiences, especially in points where I was sort of developing my relationship with some of my identities was really important.

AR: Well this is now stepping back and asking some sort of bigger questions, sort of your reflections on. And you started already to talk about this, but returning now to the idea of a feminist psychology sort of broadly defined, what do you see as kind of some of… where do you think feminist, or a feminist informed psychology needs to move to next? Or what… I guess the question is, as I've framed it here is, "What has it accomplished, but what remains to be done? What's the next thing? What are our challenges now?"

TI: That's a great question. I think feminist psychology has accomplished a lot. In fact, I was referred to one of your chapters and I haven't had a chance to read yet, but I was told "oh you have to read Alex's chapter because that will give you so much of the history." And I'm like "oh my gosh, I need to make sure that I know my history."

So, it's done so much, it's shifted the lens in so many ways, and there will always be new struggles because of that lens, because it's a lens of inquiry and it's a lens of challenge. One of my favorite quotes about multiculturalism and feminism comes from Katha Pollitt who says something like "Multiculturalism is about valuing or celebrating all cultures. Feminism is about interrogating all cultures." So, there's always going to be an interrogation with feminism and that's going to put it at odds with things sometimes in terms of celebration of some things. It's going to challenge cultures that are marginalized in some ways and challenging something that's marginalized feels really risky. And at the same time patriarchy exists in all cultures and so how can we not challenge it? But at the same time how can we value and celebrate it and understand it from within the context of the women within these cultures? And at the same time recognizing that patriarchy makes it very difficult for women to fully understand sometimes what all the things that are affecting their experience are? It's so complicated. So, we have to do somehow all of those things at once. 56:25

I also think that there's huge challenges for feminism around gender and around transgender issues and around non-binary gender. And I understand that women feel a need for spaces sometimes, and for narratives, that are from within a certain experience of having been raised as a woman, all of these things, having been socialized as a woman. That's a unique experience that has a lot of damage that's done, a lot of particular challenges. As well as a lot of particular strengths, there's a lot that comes in that. So, I can see where there's a wanting to create a circle right there, you know around that. And if cis-gendered women are feeling that way and not also acknowledging the experience of transgender people then we're closing out people who are suffering from a lot of the same gender restrictions and it seems like there's so much potential in working together. I mean, the problem isn't feminism, the problem isn't that there's transgender

people who want to be in these spaces, the problem is patriarchy. I always come back to that, the problem is patriarchy. Are there are ways that we can remember that and say "Ok we're all within that context, how do we understand each others' experience?" And also, I think it's on both sides, I think that everybody's feeling vulnerable, and this is part of the thing, everyone's feeling vulnerable. And I think it's important to recognize our vulnerabilities and also to say "Ok I recognize that I'm feeling vulnerable and I need to be brave enough to have this conversation, to listen to someone else's experience, to articulate my experience, to not just say well why don't you understand?" Which is what we're feeling. I think that's it, it's acknowledging vulnerability and it's bravery so that we can come together and fight against bigger forces that are affecting all of us.

AR: We're at quite a really crucial juncture in that regard. At this particular historical, political moment. I have a couple more questions.

TI: I'll talk as long as you want me to talk, but I also want to be respectful of your time.

AR: These are again sort of bigger questions, but you've spoken sort of obliquely to this question already. But I guess the simple question is, have you experienced or what has been your experience or awareness of the ways in which your multiplicity of identities has perhaps resulted in discrimination or sexism? Or what's the word for people who are biased against bisexuality?

TI: Bi-negativity or monosexuality.

AR: Bi-negativity, I had other words, but I didn't have that word. So, what has been your experience of those kinds of dynamics?

TI: That's a good question. I certainly have had that, I mean just the questions that people ask about bisexuality are often not validating or are invalidating my sexual orientation. There are… so I've gotten some of that in terms of my being biracial or being Asian American. I've gotten some of that, it hasn't been the most pronounced part of my experience and I feel very fortunate. I mean this… I say *my* experience, I cannot speak to other peoples' experience and I want to acknowledge that other people experience very severe discrimination around these issues. 1:01:22

I don't know if some of it is that I don't feel as vulnerable with some of these things because of some of the privilege and honestly some of the stuff, a lot of the stuff, around my sexual orientation -- I grew up heterosexual, like I don't even think I realized that I was bisexual. I think I became bisexual and I know that this is really controversial in the "born this way" narrative, but I don't think I was born this way, I think I became this way. I think there is fluidity and that doesn't mean that we shouldn't have civil rights and just the fact that it can change doesn't mean you can change it, all of these things. But I think that helps me feel like… I wasn't 14 and struggling with my sexual orientation. I didn't feel like my parents might find out about my girlfriend. I didn't have those experiences when I was at my most vulnerable. And in the schools, I didn't experience bullying around that. I was fortunate and it gave me a lot of confidence in that. I just didn't have to deal with all that and I came out when I was 25, I had a

lot of support, I knew a lot. And at this point I'm a tenured full professor, so I think I have a lot that protects me from things.

I had a conversation with someone, some random person I met at APA last year, who's asking me all these questions about bisexuality and he said "Thank you for being so open to answering my questions, because I feel like people just get angry at me when I ask these questions." And I said, "I happen to be in a place right now where I have the wherewithal to do this and I'm glad that I can, I'm glad that I can answer those questions." But anyone who's not in a place to do that, there's no shame in that.

So, have I experienced stuff? Yeah, I've experienced teasing around being Asian American when I was growing up, but not a ton of it. I certainly didn't experience some of what the African American students who I grew up with did, in terms of academic expectations people had of them. Certainly, in terms of the violence that they experience at the hands of law enforcement, all these things. The KKK is rallying in Charlottesville these days. There are things that I feel protected from, some of it internally and some of it externally.

AR: So shifting gears a little bit, what in your career or life, it doesn't have to be just your work, but in your life so far, to date, what of your accomplishments do you feel the most proud of or do you feel has made the biggest difference in a way that's really satisfying?

TI: You know that question was on the list and so I've been mulling it, this question in particular. I was like "I don't know," I've been talking to lots of people, I don't know and my partner said, "Well you're really proud of your students." And I was like "I know, I'm so proud of my students." And I love mentoring and so that is such an important piece to me, because I know that my career is only as long as my career is, and I'm not going to do everything that needs to be done in the field of LGBT psychology. And particularly, my focus is really on interventions to support LGBT people and communities. And there's not a ton of work being done in that area, there's a few people who are doing that, we need a lot more. So, I have gotten super focused on admitting students who want to do that, on training them to do that. That's really… I'm like we need more of that. And at the same time, I can only guide them so far because what I've become really aware of is that the field of LGBT psychology is so much more advanced than it was 20 years ago when I got my degree. And the science of psychology is so much more advanced than it was when I got my degree. 1:06:08

My students are doing latent class analysis, they're doing things that didn't exist when I was in graduate school and they're going to be able to take things so much farther than I ever will be able to. And I see these early career professionals and I'm like "You will surpass me so quickly and I'm so glad." Because I am so aware of the limitations of what I will be able to do in my career. So, I'm so proud of my students.

I was saying to them, just yesterday, I said, "You won't know that you've gotten to a new place in your career from how you feel inside, you will know that because suddenly people start treating you in certain ways." And that's some of what I feel really proud of, when people say, "Oh I read this piece of yours and it really affected me." A psychologist ran after me in the hallway yesterday to say, "I brought a student to your plenary on bisexuality and it changed the

trajectory of her career." And when I think about how Michelle Fine changed the trajectory of my career… and I've always said I want to be Michelle Fine when I grow up. I thought "oh my gosh, maybe I'm doing this for some other people, maybe I'm helping them to see what they can do and giving them some idea or opening up something for them" and I think that's what I'm most proud of.

AR: That sounds great. Ok - one last question. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would really like to have kind of included in this interview?

TI: That's a great question. I'm going to think for a moment.

AR: Sure.

TI: Feminism is still so important. It's not just something from the 1970's, we still need it. The patriarchy is still alive and well and affecting us so much. And feminism can be a very intersectional lens and we have to hold it as that. And we have to keep doing the work. Nothing we do will be enough, there's so much that needs to be done, but we have to do it anyway. Everybody needs to bring all they have to this. And we have to be brave enough to get past those feelings of vulnerability, so that we can do this work that's not just going to help people like us, but help the people who are allies too. And psychology has particular things to bring to feminism, and that marriage of feminism and psychology, that's a marriage I can get behind.