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## Oral Interview of Amy Blackstone by Unknown Interviewer for the Feminist Oral History Project (Part #2)

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Oral Interviews for the Feminist Oral History Project.

Interviewer: N/A (Interviewer)

Interviewee: Amy Blackstone (AB)

Date: 08/09/2007

Recording number: MF223-BlackstoneA-T2a

Length of recording: 32:53

[Transcript begins]

Interviewer: I think that should work. I tested it earlier. Well, first what's your research all about? What are you? What were you doing?

AB: I've got a couple of different projects that I do, but the research that was supported by the grant is for research on workplace sexual harassment. And it's a project that I actually started working on as a graduate research assistant when I was at University of Minnesota working on my PhD. So I think I started the project in 2000, maybe a little before that anyway, so I worked on it for a few years, I finished grad school in 2003 and came here and have since continued my work on it with the professor that I worked for in Minnesota, so now we're collaborators on it and it started off, and well continues to be a study of young workers experiences with sexual harassment and kind of a comparison of how their experiences differ between jobs that they held during their high school years and then moving into early adulthood. Did their experiences change? Are they impacted by any experiences that they had earlier during their high school years? That kind of stuff. So, the thing a lot of sociologists' study sexual harassment. It's certainly not a new topic at all, but the thing about this project that makes it a little different from other studies of sexual harassment is, first the age group that we study. Most research on sexual harassment in sociology has been done on adult workers that are kind of in the middle stages of their careers, so usually people in their 30s and 40s and then the other thing that's a little different about our study is that we study women and men's experiences, and there's been very little research done on. First of all, whether sexual harassment is something that men can and do experience. And then secondly, what is it like if they do experience it? So that's kind of the big project. And when I applied for the WIC grant, I was

attempting to do a couple of things. One, as I moved out of Graduate School and then into my position here, I've worked hard to kind of carve out my own niche within the bigger project and move from being a research assistant to a true collaborator. So, I am partly applied for the grant to help me with that and then, well I did apply for the grants of helping with that, and the way that I'm trying to carve out my own niche is in part to look at extending our study to include a comparison of other cultures. So, part of my WIC grant was to support my efforts to extend the study in that way and then the other part of that grant was to enable me to continue my own collaborations with students here. Because after I came here, I of course continued to work with Christy Bennett, Minnesota, but then I also started to work with my own students here and bring them onto the project, so I use some of the funding to continue work with UMaine students on a couple of papers that I'm writing with them.

Interviewer: So why do you think it's important, I guess. Why is it important to extend the studies? Why do you see, I guess the research as it exists as is it limited? Not having looked at men looking at this different age?

AB: Yeah, I don't know that I would say, I wouldn't call it limited 'cause it is really... there's a lot of really good research on sexual harassment, but I think there's room for more exploration and I make that distinction only because I do think what's out there is really, really strong, and we definitely rely on what other people have done for our own work. But I think that young workers occupy a very unique position in that. First of all, they tend to have very little power in the and in the workplace. Secondly, they tend to be in workplaces that especially in high school that are more service oriented and there is a lot of work that shows that those types of organizations tend to be more conducive to potentially harassing behaviors happening in them, and I also think that it's important to study young workers, because it's in your early jobs, that I think you form your ideas about appropriate workplace behavior. So, I think it's important to know what's happening in the workplaces of young people so that we can understand. You know, what people are bringing to the table when they enter the adult workforce. So, that's one thing I think the age component is really important, and then I think that the study of men is interesting in part because we are very attentive to issues of power because we're studying younger workers and we do recognize that in, you know, in most workplaces, men tend to have more power than women. So, I think including age makes it kind of an interesting dynamic to think about men's greater power than women at the same time that we're looking at younger men so that that may have an impact in shaping their

power in the workplace. And I think it's also important to look at men because certainly women studies scholars have known this for a long time, and I think sociologists are starting to catch on to the reality that gender is not only about what your sexuality is. It's not only about being male or female. In fact, gender is a lot more than just male if they know are men and women and there are lots of different versions of masculinity and femininity. And I think studying those nuances and understanding which versions of masculinity and femininity are privileged. It's very important. And I think you can only do that by studying men and women. I don't know if that makes sense?

Interviewer: yes, it does, it does. I'm really interested in in the part of your research that you're incorporating Japan and Norway? And what does that say about being sociologist? I don't know anything about any of this stuff.

AB: So that definitely the newest part of the work and it's not as far long as I or Chris would like it to be so I can't say too much about it, but I can tell you what some of our ideas are and we're still, you know, we're still working on it but we've gotten bogged down in all the other papers that were writing, trying to get through, but we do hope to do a comparison, there's been a lot of comparative work on sexual harassment as well, but most of the comparative work has looked at the United States and European Union countries.

Interviewer: OK

AB: So, one thing about those studies is that, culturally, there are a lot of similarities between Western Europe and the US, so there are important differences. But one thing we would like to do is to think about a country that is very different culturally from the US and Western European countries, so Japan is a good example of that, and it's an area that Chris has some expertise in. And then we were trying to come up I don't. I can't remember what motivated us to think that we needed three countries, but for whatever reason we were trying to come up with a third country for the study, and we thought that Norway would make a good case in part because we can use the prior work that's been done on Western European countries to think about what we might expect to find in Norway. But the thing that's unique about Norway is that it's not a part of the European Union, so the laws that are on the books for workplace interactions might differ a little bit from those in EU countries, and culturally we think that the US, Norway and Japan provide an interesting comparison because of the different values that are placed on the individual as opposed to the group. And in all honesty, I don't know if that matters or not because we're so, this is so new to both of us and we

really haven't made as much progress as we would like on that aspect, but it's definitely still something that we're working on and hoping to do.

Interviewer: So, did you go to the conference in Norway?

AB: I did in Sweden.

Interviewer: Oh, Sweden, right.

AB: In part because that's where you know where it happened to be, but there were a number of scholars from Norway there, and because the countries are so, they're right next to each other and there's a lot of collaboration among scholars in both of those countries. So, I did go to a conference in Sweden on heteronormativity in the workplace. And it was awesome. I met a number of people there from Norway that have managed to stay in contact with, none of whom actually study sexual harassment themselves, and what was interesting and exciting for me to find out was that the folks that I did meet from Norway. Couldn't tell me of any sociological study that had been done of this phenomenon in Norway, and it's certainly not because it's not something, it's not because it doesn't happen, but just not something that hasn't been studied too much there, so that's both frustrating and exciting because, sadly, what that means is, there aren't a lot of contacts for me to make with people who study exactly the same thing, but through the university contacts that made up the conference, I've been able to get connected with a woman who's an attorney for a workplace rights attorney in Norway. And then other people who just do gender kind of stuff and, so the conference was really great in terms of getting some kind of baseline information about what's been done in Norway and how Norwegian scholars are thinking about issues of gender and power, and then good in terms of finding out that this is a topic that hasn't been studied too much. Which there are some advantages to that. And then of course never would have met these people who I think are going to be very important contacts to have.

Interviewer: So now when you say that there hasn't been, a lot studied over there about this, does that mean sexual harassment in general? Or sort of sexual harassment in this age?

AB: Workplace sexual harassment. There has been some stuff done on harassment in schools and harassment among athletes and professional athletic teams but not so much on workplace harassment.

Interviewer: I wonder why?

AB: Honestly, I don't know.

Interviewer: I guess when I think of sexual harassment, I put it in the context of the workplace more immediately, which I guess is made curious, that's because I am a student, but...

AB: Well, I think that's what... at least in US that's what we hear the most about. I mean, it's against law to sexually harass students today, but the law really developed out of workplace discrimination laws, so makes sense that that's what you think of here.

Interviewer: So, uhm, you've also been collaborating with UMaine students. And what's that like is that sort of something that happens in sociology all the time that people are collaborating with students on research?

AB: Yeah, I do have a number of my colleagues work with students, and we are an Undergraduate only program so the students were working with our undergrads. I love it. It's been awesome. It's fun for me, in part because I am excited about my research and it's fun to have someone else who's interested in it and talk and, you know, be able to talk with people about it. I think it's a benefit to students because they're getting actual research experience. I think kind of unique to get in an undergraduate program. Certainly, it's the kind of experience that grad students are expected to get, but. If you're an undergrad in a program that has a graduate program, the chances are very slim that you'll have as much opportunity, at least in sociology I know it's different in other programs. I think it's nice in that regard too that undergrads are getting some research experience and the two students that I've worked with most closely on this project, neither of them is here anymore, but they both have gone, one is at the University of Minnesota, now working with Chris. So yeah, we have definitely continued our collaboration. So she's in the sociology PhD program there and then another one went to Penn State and both of them started working on this project with me here and then I have continued the collaboration with both of them since they left.

Interviewer: That's really neat that, I don't know, I just think it's a really cool a cool thing to get that experience in...

AB: Yeah, it's been really exciting for me to watch, I mean because I started this project, as a student and had kind of the mentor mentee relationship with Chris my collaborator, it's been fun to kind of move out of that role and into the role of being able to mentor other students in the project and it's just been very exciting. I love it.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, well that's great. And you were working on a different paper, with each of them? Actually, I have to ask 'cause I guess I'm like this English major and I have this one mind. But how like what is it like to write a paper collaborating? How does that work?

AB: It's hard. It works differently with every paper. When I started doing it as a graduate student, I think it depends on who the mentor is. Chris Yogan, who was my mentor, likes to actually sit down at his computer with both of us facing the computer and actually typing and thinking out loud. That doesn't work as well for me because I have to take a lot of time to think through stuff in my head before I can express it. So how I have worked with Jason and Heather, the two students who've been involved here is to, we didn't actually start out writing paper together. They started out by reading some of the work that Chris and I had written, reading other sorts of work and I would have them kind of write up like annotations of what they were reading just to, and then we would talk about it just to see what they were getting from what they were reading. And then they also helped by transcribing interviews that I had done with people. And once they did that, and I felt like they had enough background about the project, and about the sociological literature on harassment. Then it started by me, just asking them what they, what they thought about the interviews that they had transcribed. So what patterns were they seeing in the interviews that they had transcribed? What was interesting to them? About what they were hearing in the interviews and for both on the papers with them, we really just kind of picked up on themes that they identified themselves based on being familiar with what was said in the interviews and then from there once they identified something they were excited about, then I wrote a draft like a first draft of the papers, and from that point on, we've kind of already draft. I'll send it to them. They'll add some stuff, ask questions, give me feedback. So that will work on the draft and then I'll work on it and then if we see each other, I mean they're both from Maine, so thankfully I get to see them every once in a while. And they are both out of state now so and Heathers in Minnesota where I'm from so I see here when I go home and so when I meet with them personally, we'll kind of talk through where we're at with the paper, so it's lots and lots of drafts and some meeting in person, but a lot of exchanging of ideas over email and stuff to do at this point.

Interviewer: Cool, and now what is the status currently of each of those papers?

AB: On the paper with Jason, we presented together at the American Sociological Association meeting last year, and we have, we now have a draft that we feel pretty good about. I just sent him the latest draft last night actually, and the ASA meeting starts tomorrow in New York and so at the

meeting, Jason, Chris and I, Chris is also a Co-author of the paper, so the three of us are going to sit down and talk about whether anything more needs to be done on it, and if not, then we'll decide where we'd like to submit it for publication considerations, so that hasn't been submitted yet, but it's just about at the stage where it's ready to submit, and the paper with Heather, is not quite as far along as that one. We have a draft of it. We're actually presenting it at the conference this weekend. So, about a year behind where I am with the paper with Jason, so hopefully that paper will be ready to submit by the end of this coming school year.

Interviewer: And where, where is that meeting?

AB: Last year it was in Montreal, this year it's in New York City.

Interviewer: Nice.

AB: Oh, I forgot, Jason and I have written another paper too that I did credit the WIC grant with supporting. It wasn't part of my original proposal, but I spent time with that somehow working on it. There's actually five authors on that paper, but it's a paper that Chris and I and one other student at Minnesota had started writing when I was a student there, we never finished it. We all kind of forgot about it and Jason happened to find it last summer, and asked if he could be involved in it, so we said yeah if you want to do something, go for it, so he did. We submitted it to a journal for publication consideration last fall. It was rejected, so right now we're in the process of going through the reviews from that rejection and then trying to figure out kind of regrouping and figuring out where we want to try to submit again.

Interviewer: And what's that paper about?

AB: That paper is on the mental health consequences of having experienced sexual harassment. I assume you probably have a copy of my final report. Do you have a copy of what I wrote?

Interviewer: Yes, I was just going through that. Sorry, I know some of this is review. So, it's really interesting stuff to me, I don't know. It's nice to get out of one's discipline see what else is going on.

AB: Yeah, yeah, well and you're doing a lot of this, right? You're talking to everybody?

Interviewer: I'm not, I'm talking to a few people and then I'm working on this with Aaron. Who's going to continue as the grad assistant in the fall for WIC? But I'm going back to the English department to



my TA, so I'm out of here soon, but I'll at least have gotten to talk to a few people about it. So, let's see what I wanted to ask you. Oh, you had the language skills thing go at your conference...

AB: It was interesting. The conference was all conducted in English because there were people from all over the world there. But what was great about making these personal contacts that I made was that I was able to kind of practice my Norwegian speaking skills, which are not great.

Interviewer: Well, it sounded like, you were working on that a while ago.

AB: Yeah, I mean it was fun. It was really exciting to be able to use it. And I mean, I think my grammar is terrible at this point, but it was nice. I could have a conversation with people and after having met the folks that I met, I'm feeling good enough about, I mean, I feel like my language skills are at a point where I could establish rapport with somebody and chances are more than good that anyone that I would be speaking with would be fluent in English. Thankfully, but I think it's important to at least make an attempt to be able to communicate. So that went all right. I mean it was fun and I think they were entertained by my attempt.

Interviewer: Good try, that's cool. So, the parts, I just want to get straight because as I was reading through the proposal, I was having a hard time keeping straight. What exactly was part of the larger project and then what exactly was specifically part of the WIC grant? And I don't want to accidentally attribute something that's not or vice versa.

AB: Yeah, which is actually a little muddled. I mean, take a look at the report that I submitted, 'cause that definitely distinguishes which parts I. I mean, I did wind up working more on papers that were already in progress that summer than I had anticipated that I would, and for that reason I have credited the WIC grant with supporting me. So, yeah take a look at both.

Interviewer: Yeah, OK. As long as it is in here somewhere. Let's see, what else did I want to ask? I know we're going to need. I just found out we'll have to get at some point a picture of you as well for the newsletter, but that doesn't have to happen anytime super soon. So, I think if you have a photo already then that's appropriate, and if not then I can. I'll ask Ann what they usually do in terms of that.

AB: No problem.

Interviewer: Oh, I was curious. In your proposal, you make sure that you distinguish between your interest in an everyday understanding of sexual harassment versus sexual harassment law. Yeah, so I wondered if you could maybe comment on that, why is that important to make so clear or?

AB: That's a good question, but a couple of reasons, one... Why is that so important? Well, mostly I think it's important because, it's important to note that there's this distinction between those things because I think that gets forgotten. I mean, sexual harassment is a topic that you know. Many people have heard of. Many people have an idea about what sexual harassment is, but those popular understandings of the concept can be quite different from the law, and I think in terms of everyday workplace interactions, how you conduct yourself, how you respond to people in the workplace, that frankly, it's those everyday understandings that actually matter more than the legal understanding. Obviously if somebody wants to make a report, then of course the legal understanding of harassment is going to be important. But I think for 80% of us in our day-to-day interactions with work, the thing that shapes our interactions is what we believe it harassment to be. What we believe the consequences to be, whether those things have anything to do with the law or not. So that's mostly the reason that we're interested in everyday understandings that we think ultimately, that's what really shapes how people interact.

Interviewer: Interesting, so do you see yourself for the other parts, the Japanese and the Norwegian sections of your research, do you see yourself eventually conducting interviews the way you did?

AB: Yeah, but I think we'll start with the law with both of those projects only because I mean obviously the law does shape our cultural understandings, and certainly the way that the law has been written in the US does have an impact on how we understand sexual harassment. So I think that starting with the law and the other two countries will be a good way for us to kind of familiarize ourselves with the cultural norms. But I do think that it will be important to go beyond that and find out, you know, have people kind of reconstructed the meaning of this concept in their own ways in the workplace, in these other two countries, as they seem to have done in the US. I don't know what the answer to that will be, but I'm excited to find out.

Interviewer: I guess that's the point. You don't know the answer.

AB: Exactly, yeah.

Interviewer: Well, I think those were. I mean, the big questions that I had. I guess it's obvious that men are sort of, or it seems obvious anyway that men are not considered so much victims of sexual harassment?

AB: Yeah, I mean, I think that's changing. It's definitely changing in terms of the law in the United States. It was initially conceived legally as something only happen to women, and there's definitely going to shift. There's been a number of cases of men successfully bringing harassment lawsuits, but I think that's why thinking about gender is so much more important than thinking about sex differences. Because what Chris and I have found so far in our research is that it's men who kind of express their masculinity in a very particular way that seems to be more vulnerable. Men who don't express their masculinity in the normative hyper masculine way tend to be the ones who report more harassment experiences, as are men who have more egalitarian gender beliefs. So, if you're not hyper masculine that seems to be the most privileged way of doing gender, and if you're not hyper masculine, either because you're a man and you choose not to express yourself that way or because you're a woman and you can't, then it looks like you're probably more vulnerable.

Interviewer: I wonder if there would be, do you think there's a difference between who's experiencing this and who's reporting it?

AB: Possibly, yeah, and that's an interesting question. I mean, that's one thing that we're trying to get at in our study is what sorts of behaviors are you experiencing in the workplace and how do you understand those behaviors? So two different people could have the exact same thing happen to them but ascribe different meanings to it. So, and that's what one thing that we're interested in understanding is what makes one person decide that, I don't know, being rubbed up again by their boss is offensive and another person not be offended by that .

Interviewer: It's so interesting to think that. Well, I really think that was the last question. But if I come up with other things as I'm writing this up, can I email you?

AB: Yeah, of course.

Interviewer: I mean is there anything else you feel like you want to make sure is included in this little article?

AB: I don't think so I appreciate that you're feeling a little fuzzy about distinguishing the WIC grant from the other work. Because I'm struggling with that too. So, if there's if you have questions about that, well really about anything I'm happy to respond.

Interviewer: Well, I appreciate your time and for being willing to meet with me again.

AB: I think I have cancelled them once or twice. I'm glad it worked out.

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah, before the end of the summer.

[End of transcript]