Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Dr. Em Matsuno

Interviewed by Lucy Xie
Toronto, Ontario
February 2, 2026

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

When citing this interview, please use the following citation:

Stephens, D. (2026, February 2). Interview by L. Xie [Video Recording].

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History and Online Archive Project. Toronto, ON.

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

Alexandra Rutherford, PhD
Project Director, Psychology's Feminist Voices
alexr@yorku.ca

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Dr. Em Matsuno

Interviewed by Lucy Xie
February 2, 2026

LX: Lucy Xie, Interviewer
EM: Em Matsuno, Interview Participant

LX: My name is Lucy Xie. I'm interviewing Dr. Em Matsuno on February 2nd, 2026, over Zoom to discuss their life and career in the context of feminism and psychology. So, currently I am in Boston, Massachusetts, and Dr. Matsuno is in Phoenix, Arizona, I believe.

EM: Yeah. Well, Tempe, but it's a kind of a suburb of Phoenix. **[00:29]**

LX: Okay.

EM: So all grouped together, yeah.

LX: I see in Tempe, Arizona. And so, I guess to start, could you please share your birthday and where you were born?

EM: Sure, yeah. So, I'll introduce myself again. My name's Em Matsuno, they/them pronouns. My birthday is December 30th, 1990, and I was born in Laramie, Wyoming.

LX: Cool. Thank you. I guess to start off, we usually start with the question: How did you become a feminist or how did you first start to relate to feminism, whether it's feminism or any other social justice-oriented identities that fit best with you

EM: Yeah, yeah. Sounds good, I can go into that whole story and also please feel free to follow up with follow-up questions or move me along because I never know if I'm [going too in-] depth or anyways, just feel free to interrupt. So, my start with feminism. I'm going to say my first influence would be my mom. So, my mom is a…was a law professor (she is retired now). She was quite older - she had me when she was 41 years old. But so… she was definitely a feminist. So I think even though I didn't really have the language at the time, her role modelling had a big influence on me. She went to college at Cornell University in the late '60s. So as a college student, she was really involved in the feminist movement, like the second-wave feminism and the civil rights movement. She was at some of those really big marches in Washington DC. And then she went to law school and was a law student at NYU [New York University]. So I just think at that time there were very very few women in law school, and so, she would tell me stories about some of her experiences. One story she told me was that in class, the professor, a male professor went around to every woman in the class and said: 'Are you Mrs. or Miss?'. And then, I had never thought about like: "Oh, like for women there's Mrs. and Miss, but for men there's only mister". And whether you're married or not defines who you are." So, she would tell me stories like that about her experience. And then also, just in our household **[3:09]** she and my dad had a very egalitarian relationship. So they split the chores 50/50. So my dad would cook one week, my mom would cook the next week. They both did the dishes and all the

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

housework. And I didn't think that was unusual, until talking to peers and realizing maybe that that gender dynamic was definitely different and definitely comes from my mom's values in feminism.

And then, the other thing I appreciated from my mom and both my parents was that they really allowed me to be a gender expansive child and be "tomboy" (air quotes), is the terminology and really didn't restrict my gender roles in any way. So I think that was really, really good, and I think that my role modelling from my mom definitely [affected me]. And then, I can go in more depth about my life story and history. But I definitely learned…had a lens of oppression from a young age from growing up in Wyoming.

So [I] grew up in Laramie, Wyoming. It's a very conservative homogenous type of community, religious, highly religious. And so, just being a person of color, and my dad being an immigrant from Japan (he immigrated for graduate school). Like definitely, realized I was different from other people. I felt excluded in a low of ways. And so, even when I was very very young, I kind of had a lens of being on the outside. And so then, I think that progressed as I got older. And in high school I got involved in some high school clubs. There was a multicultural club and it consisted of like five to ten people of colour in the entire high school. So, we bound together, but that kind of gave me more and more awareness and more activism. And then in college, that expanded as well to me coming more into queer identity really, I went to college at CU [Colorado University] Boulder and that's where I really came out and was like kind of more free from my context of growing up in Wyoming. And I had a very strong queer women community, **[5:36]** and strongly identified with the lesbian community, and learned from different friends of just having that critical lens and more feminist lens. I don't know, they were in Vagina Monologues [laughs]. I didn't know all of that kind of stuff, so [I was] just expanding my awareness more and more.

And then in graduate school is where I think I had even more depth and maybe more connection to a feminist identity. Because I was able to TA [be a teaching assistant] for feminist studies courses. So I was a graduate student from counselling psychology but our program didn't offer that many assistantships or TA-ships. So, my mentor (I'm like putting a lot of breadcrumbs of things I can talk about), but my mentor, Tania Israel, encouraged me to apply to the Feminist Studies department. So all of my TA-ships were in feminist studies courses or sociology and that really gave me the opportunity to expand my reading and understanding of the roots of feminism. One of the favourite classes, that was definitely influential for me, was TA-ing for "Women of Color". And I was like "Yes!" I got to read Audre Lorde and Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga and I had heard all about that but I just had this opportunity, from being a TA, to deep dive into that work. And that became a very big influence on me personally, the importance of intersectionality in the "Women of Color" class was a really big turning point.

Let's see, I'll say I have lots of different stories, so I'm kind of going all over the place and I can jump backwards. Another thing that I did in graduate school which I think was really life changing and extremely influenced my advocacy and feminist identity was work with a local non-profit called *Just Communities*. Again, my mentor Tania [Israel] encouraged me to pursue involvement in this and through this organization I basically was kind of a camp counsellor at a camp that was all focused on learning about systems of privilege and oppression. So it's called the Community Leadership Institute. And all the facilitators, we did lots of trainings prior to going to this camp and then we did a week camp with youth, mostly high school student-age. And the entire curriculum was around understanding privilege and oppression with really really experiential activities. So I feel often we get like this intellectual perspective of like systems and oppression, but it was so emotional I cried every

©Psychology's Feminist Voices 2026

single day. There was a theme everyday, so we did classism, sexism, cisheterosexism and racism. And the whole day we would spend processing. So we would do privilege walks where you, you're holding hands in a line and then based on the statement, you move a step forward or move a step backward so that [was] very emotional and eye-opening. And we would do fishbowl activities. So I remember specifically the sexism day (I did this camp for multiple years) but on the sexism day you know, everybody like women or people impacted by sexism would sit in the fishbowl and describe their experiences of oppression and then the privilege group sits on the outside and just listens, and they can't participate. And on that day there was just so much trauma, and from the young people's experiences of sexual violence, witnessing family members experiencing domestic violence, and anyway, so I feel like and then there was just so much processing, crying. And we had a process consultant, and so that was the other thing - we had an observer who would call out all the different gender dynamics, racial dynamics [as they were] happening. I felt like that experience taught me more than my graduate, any of my graduate training, of really really working through my biases and understanding from not just a head but a heart perspective of the impacts of oppression and how to move through that. So I just wanted to share that experience, because I feel like that was unique, and not very common in probably a lot of professional training but was such a such a valuable experience to get involved in that grassroots organization.

LX: Yeah…that's actually…so I would love to hear more about that. Can you share a little bit more about…I know you kind of talked about it moving from a head to heart, **[11:11]** a more heartfelt understanding of the impacts of oppression. Can you share about, more about, what it was about that experience that was so rich and meaningful to you?

EM: I mean, I think that the activities, you feel people's pain and you're with people in their pain and you're witnessing, you're witnessing and being witnessed in your pain. And I think that's a different experience to sit in the pain of oppression than to learn or read about it. And so I think hearing people's lived experiences and seeing and allowing ourselves to go there, and express anger or just express all feelings and making it very explicitly like we…Yeah, I'm trying to remember the different activities that we did. I can't really describe it without being there but I think just that really deep seeing each other in that way and processing a privilege. I think a lot of students learn in classes like: "Okay, I have privilege, so I need to be aware of it, but what does that mean or what do I do?" So, also we broke out…so we had a whole day right? So we also broke out into groups where people in the oppressed group could come together and share, people in the privileged group could come together and share. So we had activities that were together and separate, and yeah, so being able to reflect on my own life and think about things I didn't realize were fucked up. And realize like, "Oh wow" and have a space to process that but then also hear from other people, and really open my eyes on the privileges that I have, but also just the pain of those oppressive experiences.

LX: Right. Because I think these topics are so inherently personal. **[13:27]**

EM: Yeah.

LX: And it sounds…and sometimes we can talk about them in a way that can feel kind of removed from the deeply personal nature of them. And it sounds like being able to connect with people both in shared lived experiences that might help articulate your experiences and also being able to hear from people with different experiences and being able to be so supportive though all those is what I'm hearing.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

EM: And I just…in an education setting it's super hard to do that, and I'd say from an instructor perspective, it's super hard to do that. And in this climate that we're currently in, that's very anti-DEI [Diversity Equity and Inclusion] training, It would be extremely hard to do that. Because it is a lot to manage and process and everybody's at a different identity development stage. So, I understand why it's hard to go there. But, yeah, I think for people doing this work, if they have an opportunity to go to a process group or just a really in-depth multiple days where you're talking about these topics in a more explicit and personal way than an academic way, that just takes it to a new level.

LX: I feel it's definitely really challenging to do that. Is it something that you've tried to kind of incorporate into your own work and your own teaching and research in any…

EM: Yeah, yeah to some extent…so I've done a lot of training on gender-affirming therapy and, I guess, I've done a lot of guest lectures or things around LGBTQ issues. And so I definitely try to bring in that personal flavour. Maybe we can't get to that exact level of depth but I like to share personal stories about my own life. I like to show videos of people talking about their experiences so that it does get to that place of empathy and that heart area—and not just the head space. **[15:44]** Yeah, yeah. So to the extent that I am able to and it again it depends on, you know, if you're just meeting you don't have time to build safety and trust, then that's going to be a little bit more challenging. But yeah, I think it has definitely influenced my teaching style and when I'm doing training related to diversity issues.

LX: Right. It sounds like finding opportunities to incorporate that whenever you can.

EM: Absolutely.

LX: And I also hear from what you've shared about your upbringing, starting from your mom to your graduate work, how much those values have become really embedded into your way of life. And I was wondering if you could share about how you've merged those values with your work in research, in practice.

EM: Absolutely. I wrote down some notes. So yeah, I mean I think in so many ways. So I'll start with research and scholarship. Definitely foundational in how I approach research - intersectionality definitely comes from my feminist roots, and it's important to acknowledge that, and just thinking from a systems lens and from an intersectional lens, from this feminist root. So those are the theories I bring in or [are] kind of the starting point of how I'm approaching research. I think I've also learned to challenge positivistic lens in research and come from a more constructivist, critical approach. And as I've gotten more interested in qualitative approaches that weave in those feminist viewpoints and just think about reflexivity and subjectivity and valuing lived experiences and now just knowledge from like a specific positivistic lens. **[17:55]** Like I don't think that there's like this: "Oh we discover this one truth". And so, I think like those philosophical underpinnings, I think helped me in my research that I do because I do a lot of qualitative and mixed methods research. I think….all my research is really not for the [sole] sake of learning something but for the sake of liberation, empowerment, like how do we continue supporting people and their healing from oppression, and then, also how do we change systems of oppression to be less oppressive and advocate in that way? So that also is definitely always my aim and mindset.

LX: [flips camera backwards] Sorry about that.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

EM: No worries.

LX: Okay, but sorry, continue.

EM: Let's see. Another big interest in my area of research is challenging norms. So I feel like that is also influenced by queer theory but there is so much overlap and interconnection with feminist theory. And just challenging the norm and why does it have to be that way and where does that come from? And where are the roots of that? And so just getting into normativity theory, which starts from heteronormativity and a lot of the work from queer theorists, and then, taking those lenses and applying it to trans and non-binary populations and challenging different ways that we create norms and systems of hierarchy even within community and how we can challenge that.

So, I can expand on any of those things, but I have another big area that I wanted to talk about of how feminist values impact my work. And one of the biggest ways I see it impact my work is my mentorship style and leadership style. And so, yeah I liked sitting with this question becomes I'm like: "Oh yeah, actually this is very influenced by role models", who are feminist leaders and women leaders in the field and who have modelled relational forms of leadership. So I think one of the ways in an academic system that I try to maybe change or defy some of the norms is through my leadership style in attending to power dynamics. Focusing a lot on relationships and the importance of building relationships is more important than getting to the agenda and productivity, and yeah just being collaborative. So even in my classes, something that I do in all my classes to an extent is allow students feedback to help shape the class. So, I'll just give an example of the class I'm teaching right now because it comes to mind. So I go through the syllabus on the first day and I say "Okay everybody, here are the objectives, so these are what we need to walk away with, but how we do that can be shifted or exact topics can be shifted as long as they align with these learning objectives. [Here are] some of my ideas and plan, but you know, I want to make sure I'm filling gaps in your knowledge that you're not getting elsewhere, I don't know, maybe you've talked about this topic a lot in other classes."

So, in the current class I'm teaching, we have four modules, it's a class on counselling psychology foundations. So we have professional development, research, practice, and advocacy are like the four modules, but in each there's at least one class period that's open. So, we came up with, as a class, what topics students were interested in and, I did a poll where people actually voted. Because I wanted to recognize that some people might not feel as empowered sharing. So, I wanted to make it as open as possible to getting people's feedback, and then based on what the class survey [showed] then, that's what we're going to talk about in class. So, I don't feel like that's that radical, **[22:29]** but I feel in a way the students are like "Whoa we never get a say in what we do, we never get a say in the course policies". So you know I'm checking in with them, and I always do a mid-course feedback, and then if they say, you know, it's really hard to, like this assignment is a lot of work, we adjust it to kind of shift it. Okay, how can we still meet the goals, but shift it in a way that is better? So just trying to take that collaborative approach and then definitely with my students in my lab, trying to be as collaborative as possible in a similar way. But that relationality, empowerment, attention to the power dynamics are from a very foundational feminist [place] that comes from feminist clinical work, feminist supervision. And yeah, that is very much a way that I feel those values come into my work.

LX: So it sounds like across so many different spheres of this work, it's like not only do they come through in what you're teaching and researching but also how and why. I'm hearing a lot of intentionality in the process of it.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices 2026

EM: Yeah, thank you. I think intentionality is definitely something that is a very big value of mine, what is the intentionality, and then transparency. So with every assignment it's "Okay this is my intention, and this is what I'm hoping." And then, I think that transparency helps make it collaborative and when there is a power dynamic as well, and acknowledging that and talking about that with mentees and things like that as well. Yeah.

LX: That feels like it kind of gets to the question we were talking about earlier in terms of how do we embody this in teaching, and that feels very much aligned.

EM: Yeah.

LX: Thank you for sharing. I'm also wondering if you can share a little bit about what attracted you to psychology as a field and how you got into it.

EM: Sure. Yeah. So, I'll start with college. I mentioned I went to CU Boulder, and I came in and I was a double major. So, I was a psych major and music major. I didn't really know what I was going to do, and I had played classical guitar for most of my life. That was a very big part of my youth. And so I was like, "Okay, I guess I'm going to do music in college", because that's what I had known. So, I was a music major playing classical guitar, **[25:34]** but I also chose psychology because that was my other favorite course in high school and something I was interested in. And then, you know, I really liked my social psychology classes. We started learning about prejudice and things that really interested me. And I took a research methods in social psychology class which I really liked. But I think what really pulled me into this career was going to therapy myself. So, I had gone into therapy in high school, and that's another story I can get into. But when I was a college student, and I went to the college counseling center, I went to therapy because I was dealing with a lot of stress around my father, who had a lot of mental health issues. But I just went to one therapy session and I came out and I felt so heard and so seen and I felt so relieved and I just was like "I'm going to graduate school to become a therapist" and I just I had this moment: "This is what I'm doing". And from that moment on I said, "Okay, what do I need to do? I need to get research experience, I need to get clinical experience". Then, I just started my trajectory of getting into a research lab and stared an honours thesis. I volunteered at the college counselling centre, where we did peer counselling and different volunteer projects. Then I met a lot of counsellors and they gave me a lot of good advice about counselling psychology or clinical psychology and all of that. So that influenced me and I applied to not that many schools but I applied to a few counselling psych programs and mainly based on who I wanted to worth with, and that's how I found Tania [Israel], who ended up being my advisor. So I applied to work with her, I was shocked that I got the interview. I flew out to Santa Barbara. I did that whole thing and then I also have such a distinct memory of getting a phone call from her that I got in. I ducked into an empty classroom so I could talk to her and I just cried and was like, "My life is changing"! And then I went to graduate school but I feel very lucky that I kind of had this confidence of knowing I was just like "This is where I need to go, this is what I need to do". And then, in graduate school, it just even more affirmed my path, so yeah, I feel very fortunate that it worked out. I'm happy to expand on later on or further but that was kind of the origins.

LX: Yeah. I'd love to hear more about that. It sounds almost like…especially that therapy, your own personal therapy, it sounds almost like it unlocked a missing puzzle piece. The way I'm hearing it, all these pieces are kind of building then that was like the puzzle piece and then it launched you into a trajectory, kind of really set everything into place or motion.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

EM: Yeah, because I was really interested in my psychology class but I didn't really know…I hadn't been thinking about beyond undergrad. But that therapy experience was like, "Okay, I really want to go to clinical or counselling psychology. But I also really liked the research component, and so that's why I was like, okay I want to do a PhD. And yeah, then I learned more about counselling psychology and clinical psychology and where different people worked. So when I went into graduate school, I was undecided: Do I want to do clinical work or research? But I mean, that's what I love about this job, you get to wear so many hats. It's definitely hard sometimes but I'm able to feel fulfilled from mentoring students, so that's a lot of interpersonal interaction and being able to help that I enjoy. But then, research I just really fell in love with, and I think I had great mentorship around that, and seeing how that could make in impact. So that influenced me in that direction. And then teaching as well, I love teaching. And so, I felt like okay…and I liked clinical work as well too, but I felt like, okay I'm slightly more drawn in this direction, which has kind of led me to towards that academic trajectory.

LX: What is it about the teaching and research that you love so much? **[30:23]**

EM: Well, [in terms of] research, I like the ideas of research and I like the impact of research, and I like talking about research, and over time I've grown to enjoy writing. I do like doing data analysis because it's very exciting to see what the results will be. But obviously there's a lot of tedious, time consuming things in research that maybe wouldn't be my go-to. But going to conferences and talking to other people about research and getting excited about ideas, like: "Oh you're doing this, well, what about this direction or what about this?" I think just intellectually [it is] very stimulating, and so yeah, I feel like it's a skill that I enjoy. And then how can I use that. So I'm definitely very interested in applied research. How do we use research toward social justice, advocacy, supporting communities? And so, since I could see how that could be used as a tool toward those goals, then I felt like that would be nice and helpful. And then with teaching I didn't know that I was going to like it, but there's something about it, like, yeah those early TA experiences that I enjoyed. And I think those leadership roles I'm drawn to as well. And so, I felt like I've been able to lean into those roles more in that capacity. There's something nice about clinical work where you get this one-on-one really deep intimacy and that's really powerful and meaningful, but I think in terms of being a mentor, being a leader, and teaching on the broader scale is something that I just felt a little bit more drawn to.

LX: Like it's like the ability to make such an impact within the field, and have that also be grounded in your own relationships with people in the field too.

EM: Yeah.

LX: And I also hear how much like your values have been a part of your work for so long. I'm wondering if you've ever experienced any sort of discrimination as a result of doing this work, having the values that you do.

EM: Sure, yeah. I feel like because I haven't experienced anything very extreme and a lot of people, my colleagues that do similar work, have, so I feel anxious about "Am I next?" in some sense. But yeah, as a graduate student, so the timing of the political climate and my trajectory is kind of interesting. In graduate school, when I was a graduate student, I was just starting this research in trans and non-binary identities. So I felt like I was very lucky to be in the right place in the right time, where people were very interested in my research, and there wasn't much. I think there was a lot of like the mid 2010s…between 2010 and 2020, there was so much more visibility of non-binary

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

identities, trans identities. People were like, “What is this? What are pronouns?” And so people were really hungry for knowledge and research, in a way that was super beneficial to my career because people were wanting that information, and I also got involved in a lot of training and I did so many “trans 101’s” and I think people were very interested in my perspective to the point of more tokenization I guess in a way. Not always, but a lot of the times it’s like “Oh this is a new topic, we need to check this box off” or kind of wanting me to “Oh if you sign off on this then we’re good and it shows that we’re not transphobic” or like you know different things like that. So, in some sense, I think sometimes I was used, or just had a lot of demand on my labour of like Oh, I’ll give an example. A newsletter editor from a professional APA [American Psychological Association], said “I’m writing this piece, but I’m really really old and I’m really bad about trans stuff, can you read it to make sure it’s not transphobic”? And I didn’t know this person, so that would be like an example of “Okay, you’re clearly using me and expecting this labour of me.” And I didn’t feel like you’re valuing me because we didn’t have any relationship, so it was kind of that lens, but not a ton of hostility. And I was a graduate student in California, and I was always in very liberal kinds of areas as well, and within the field of counselling psychology it’s also just understood and valued - that perspective. And so I did feel a lot of appreciation for my work, and when I was on the job market I think I did really well because people were like, “This is a topic that is under-researched”. And so I do feel like it helped me.

So now, fast forward, we are in 2026, and basically the word “trans” is banned from any NIH [National Institutes of Health] proposals. DEI in general is being banned, people are being fired for teaching DEI toipcs like… I at this point would be very scared to teach a gender diversity-related course. So it’s just interesting that it’s so different, how times shift. And so now I’m just more cautious and careful, and I’ve seen colleagues get complaints from students and have to defend that and are at risk of their jobs and things like that. So yeah, that’s kind of where we’re at right now. I still am very fortunate that I’m in a very resource-privileged place. I still have a protected academic job. So definitely I’ve had a lot of privileges and resources and supports that I could even be in this position currently.

LX: It’s like seeing first hand how quickly the tides can shift, and how much of a world of difference it is to go from where you started off to where things are now. That feels really jarring to hear.

EM: And there’s definitely some people who are consistent, like thinking this is important, but then I think you know, a lot of institutions, it’s all about capitalism and money. So it’s like all of sudden, you’re very valuable because you’ll make us look good and you’ll make us look diverse, and then oops, next second, we don’t want anything to do with you because now you’re going to lose us money. So being in that position is very interesting and we’ll see how it evolves over time.

[38:03]

LX: That feels really relevant to the example earlier, your example that you gave of because of the work you do, almost like using it as a checkbox, as labour to do for someone else without them actually … it’s almost like managing image in a way rather than caring about the people and the work itself.

EM: Yes, I’ve definitely experienced that. Yes, and I don’t know if it’s helpful. I can talk about some early life and experiences and how that has kind of influenced me. I don’t know if that’s…

©Psychology’s Feminist Voices 2026

LX: Sure.

EM: Because' that's kind of more recent and since my professional career, but I'll just say a little bit because I feel like these narratives get more biographical and personal. So I'll share a little bit of my story. So I grew up in Laramie, Wyoming. My dad's an immigrant. I'm biracial, my mom's white and both my parents were very highly educated, so that definitely gave me a lot of resources. But still, the environment of being the only person of color was difficult, even if it wasn't explicit, although there was definitely explicit [incidents] like making fun of Asian culture, teasing and things like that. So definitely from a very young age, I was like: "Oh, how do I fit in? How do I be accepted"? And then, I think as a multi-racial person, and then also having [a] multicultural household, that also had a big influence on me.

So, one interesting experience I had was - we had moved to Japan when I was six years old. So when I was very young, we moved to Japan for a year, and it's like, oh, I look similar in some ways to the people around me, but then I felt still like an outsider. Especially because I was American and, first of all, I was like learning the language, was learning the cultural customs -that was very humbling and kind of [a] stressful experience to move to a completely…and Japan has a very different culture, you know, than the U.S.. But I also had distinct experiences of being made fun of for being American and being white. I have a memory of, I'm in first grade, but we had a group project and we had to colour something and somebody coloured outside the lines, and then everybody blamed me. They were like, "You did it" and I felt like it was because of my American white identity. So, I think as a biracial person, it's like, "Okay, well I don't belong here and I don't belong there, like, where do I belong?" And I really wanted to have a concrete category of like, okay, here's where I belong, but then I think over time, **[41:12]** I grew comfortable with nuance, being in the in-between, not having to be so concrete, and I think that's been super beneficial in my life. Like, people, it's uncomfortable to not have things in black or white, but it's so powerful to be able to look beyond the black and white and say you can have the in-between, you can have outside, and that perspective from my racial identity development definitely influenced and helped me with my gender journey and being more comfortable not feeling like I have to fit myself into the feminine or masculine box as well.

So, yeah, I think those early experiences really influenced me. And then my other experiences in Wyoming were around my sexual orientation and gender because, so in Laramie, Wyoming, I think maybe younger folks may not remember this, but Laramie, Wyoming is where Matthew Shepard was murdered. And that's a pretty infamous historical event that got like a lot of national attention, and now there's like the Laramie Project and everything. So that happened when I was eight or nine, and so my very first time ever learning about or hearing the word 'gay' or what it was to be gay was learning about the murder of a gay person. So Matthew Shepard is a gay college student who was murdered in my hometown just a few minutes away from my house, where he was tied to a fence and beaten to death. And so that's the context of getting a lot of messages that it's not okay to be queer, [there was] no representation, I barely saw any queer people, let alone any in a same-sex couple, or anything like that. Also, just being in high school, I was very active in a religious community, again to try and fit in and belong with my peers - who were very religious, in a Christian organization. That was a big part of my identity, and I was going to church, and I was going to Sunday school, and I was going to youth group, and I was going to all these things and then we learned in Sunday school, for an entire summer, we had a series of topics on why homosexuality is a sin. So, then I'm getting these messages right at the same time I'm figuring out my sexual orientation, so I think that had a very negative impact on me and then ultimately led me to not identifying as Christian, and breaking off with my friend group and really, really rebelling and getting into drugs and alcohol. It was just not an

©Psychology's Feminist Voices 2026

affirming environment for me to be myself and be authentic. And so I did a lot of pretending and trying to fit into these different roles, and I had a lot of internalized stigma and shame about my identity. Like in my senior year of high school for one of my classes, we got to do an ethnography….

EM: Oh, no problem [that you have to leave]. Sorry, I see you.

LX: Bye Ghazal, thank you for joining us **[44:35]**. Sorry.

EM: No problem. Bye.

LX: Bye.

EM: Oh yeah, okay, so I'm talking about my ethnography. So, in my senior year of high school we had to do an ethnography on different cultures. So I chose to do GSA [Gay Straight Alliance] at the college because there's no like [group at the high school]. Yeah. Anyway, so I did the GSA and I was like, "Oh, this is just for research, it is not anything else". But I remember going for the first time, there's probably like five or six queer people, and I was so uncomfortable being around queer people, or gender non-conforming people. I just have that distinct memory of thinking about how deep my internalized shame and discomfort was. And then, at the same time of course, I had this curiosity but still this like this discomfort of internalizing that this is wrong or like, yeah anyways. So, where am I going with this story? I guess then I mentioned going into college, coming into my queer identity, finding community and then going into graduate school where one of the main projects I did with my mentor, Tania Israel, was we were working on interventions (online interventions), to decrease internalized stigma. And so, I remember going and working directly on this intervention that I feel I would have so benefited from and now I'm getting to give back. So I feel like that was a very impactful and meaningful experience.

LX: Right.

EM: Yeah, that's all to share that those early personal experiences had a huge influence on why I went into psychology, why is so meaningful, the work is so meaningful.

LX: It's almost like what I'm hearing is in so many different spheres it's kind of like feeling different, kind of almost at odds, in some way, whether from implicit or explicit messaging, that sounds like it some of them being very violent to. Then, finding almost a home, and being able to lean more into a version of yourself that is much more authentic and more connected with who you are.

EM: Yes, I think moving from conforming to norms to authenticity has been huge. And then just being able to move away from trying to please everyone else's expectations, to move into authenticity. That's been a huge lesson, and then how good it feels to be accepted for your authentic self, you know, because that's what you're seeking when you're trying to belong, but then you don't actually quite get that. Even if you have that affirmation, if it's not your authentic self, then it's missing something. So being able to reclaim and find my authenticity has helped me find community and myself and that's part of my journey that I really appreciate.

LX: I also heard that you…heard you mention kind of like that almost like journey for being able to feel more comfortable existing in that middle ground across all of these different identities, **[48:35]** and seeing the benefits of it, and what it can bring. I'm wondering if you can and I know you

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

mentioned Tania Israel, are there other experiences or people that have made that process easier for you?

EM: Well, Tania I can just talk about Tania for a little bit. I don't know if it will connect to the outside binaries but I mean in a way it does.

LX: Sure.

EM: So, Tania is really who is featured on the website and like it's her photo on the "Feminist Presence" [part of the Psychology's Feminist Voices website], so I was like, "Oh it's Tania", so I went and listened to her videos when I was preparing for this because I was like, "Oh, I wanna listen to Tania's". Anyway, Tania, she was my advisor as a graduate student. She is also biracial, bisexual, and she I think also is very interested in that experience of like [being] in-between and challenging and not needing to push into these specific boxes, and the beauty of that comes with being outside and the beauty of embracing multiplicity and both and that it's just such a strength because when you think outside the boxes, it's liberating, it's freeing. You can totally reimagine things, you can mix the different light and dark, or masculinity and femininity, and it just gives you more freedom for authenticity. So I feel like in the beginning, like just from my identities being forced into that, I feel like it's been super freeing, and in a way, I'm like, "Wow I'm lucky I get to see these nuanced perspectives" and maybe reach that level of authenticity that much more deeply because I'm already outside the norm, so then, I might as well … like there is not a box for me to fit into, so I need to figure out…who am I from that starting point. So I feel like it's given me a lot of strength in that way.

LX: That also sounds like it ties so much to your work on norms too, like those norms and not conforming to those norms. But the journey and process of almost coming home to yourself and figuring yourself out and creating yourself.

EM: Yeah.

LX: That it's all, I feel like it's so incredible to hear about how meaningful and impactful the mentorship experience you've had with Tania Israel. Can you share more about her?

EM: Let me brag a little bit. Yeah, so I feel super lucky to have Tania as my mentor. Mentorship in graduate school is really important and that's what I've seen where people burn out or don't make it or just have so much stress or are really empowered. So Tania was such a good role model, and just a compassionate good person, a caring mentor, who really cared about mentorship, very great leader. Again, I was talking [earlier] about leadership styles, and something that she really helped do was build a sense of community and peer mentorship within our lab. And that was really important because most of the people in our lab were queer and trans, and actually during my time there were two other nonbinary people in the lab. So that helped me a lot, when I was kind of…I was coming out and kind of exploring my gender during graduate school. So having those, knowing those others was very influential. And like [at] APA [conventions] she always organized and hosted meetings for past students and current students so that it has this community, family feel. And I've gone on after graduating and collaborated with several people from the lab because there's just like this understanding that we're academic family and will come together in that way. **[53:02]** And that's something I've definitely tried to take into my role as a professor, to try to build community within the lab and try to build peer mentorship within the lab, and that it's not, it's not just about academics, it is about building a community and a network and a support system to go through these really

©Psychology's Feminist Voices 2020

challenging experiences, and to have that representation and mentorship and support. So I think yeah, leadership style that's definitely influenced me, and she's just so passionate about research and so she makes it fun and like "Oh yeah this is important" and she really models that. And seeing her at conferences, she was always introducing me and helping me get into different opportunities, and again, she really helped influence me toward a feminist lens. Like I remember I had to write an essay on my theoretical orientation for comps [comprehensive exams], you might be familiar with something similar, and she was like "You realize that you're feminist? What you're doing is a feminist approach"? I was like "What, really? So, she kind of helped me [see that], yeah, you're incorporating systems of power. And so in little ways she helped me… she introduced me to AWP [Association for Women in Psychology] conferences and other things like that. In that way, I think she helped integrate that feminist identity for me, and helped me realize that I was already doing a lot of those things.

LX: It's really easy to forget that when you're in the training process and early on in your career, where it's hard to recognize what you're doing. And it sounds like she was really able to kind of spell that out for you, and push you even further down that, down that path towards your own values, and towards creating your own identity and your own passions about the work.

EM: Yeah.

LX: It's incredible to hear about this too because I really do believe that you embody a lot of those values as well. So, incredible to see kind of like the origins of where that took place or hear about it.

EM: Yeah.

LX: What are some pieces of advice that you'd offer to people early on in this field? **[55:40]**

EM: Yes. So my advice is that relationships matter a lot. I think we think our to-do lists matter, and sure, yeah, it's good to do your to-do list, but invest in relationships because that is what will sustain you long-term, and that is what's going to fill your cup up and that's what's going to give you meaning. So, you have a lot of pulling demands on different things, but it's worth it to go out with your friends, it's worth it to take a meeting to find mentorship. I feel like I've been successful in my career but I feel like it's because I've created community and I've reached out, and even as a graduate student, meeting other graduate students at conferences and getting involved in committees and then continuing where we can collaborate together but we like each other, and we have a strong relationship and that helps us do meaningful work. It's not purely this professional work relationship. Having relationships has given me so many meaningful opportunities where, oh this person worked with me and then they recommend me for a project, then I meet somebody else. I feel like that's how I got grants because people invited me to be on them. And so if you don't have relationships with people and if you don't have mentors who can introduce you and connect you then you're going to be limited. So again, I just find human connection is the root of what keeps us alive, what keeps us going, what keeps meaning in our lives, what brings joy, what helps us not burn out. So don't overlook or underestimate the power of relationships.

LX: It's almost like all paths lead towards connection and relationships in this field and also in life.

EM: Yeah.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

LX: There's another question on here [the interview protocol] about which of your accomplishments you're most proud of, and I'm really getting a sense that the relationships and the communities that you've built are consistently a part of that.

EM: Bingo. Yes, but I do want to answer this question because I do think it is important as you move along to take times to reflect on, like, what have I done and what's meaningful? And so the first thing that comes to mind in terms of what I'm most proud of is definitely my students, and building a lab I feel is a very supporting, empowering space; it's called Empowerment Lab. So seeing my students help each other, and grow and meet their potential and push me or push the field forward, including myself, I'm very proud of that. And speaking of community, I feel that is a skill that I have that is helpful in moving towards advocacy and liberation. Something I've thought about and that I want to talk about with students in my class, is like you don't have to do everything. There's a lot of pressure on you to be an advocate, you have to be protesting **[59:30]**, you have to be testifying in court, you have to be writing educational documents, you need to be organizing. But I think one thing I've learned is: try to figure [out] what your strengths are because it's not an individual effort, it's going to be a community effort. And so we can all play different roles and build on our strengths toward those roles. For me, what I think I've realized is that one of my strengths and what I enjoy doing is building community and building support. So one thing that I look back on that I didn't expect - and it's not exactly academic - but something that I'm proud of is how I've built a community of trans and nonbinary students in our field. And how that just naturally evolved.

So I was on some committee, some graduate committee, it might have been APAGS (American Psychological Association of Graduate Students), I can't remember exactly. But on this committee it happened to be that there were three other non-binary people and myself. And we were like "Whoa, this is so cool that we share this experience". And for me, I had my lab, so I had a little bit more support, but for them, a lot of them in the programs, they're like, "I'm the only one, nobody knows anything about trans issues, I have to constantly educate people, I'm constantly misgendered, and I don't have resources, I don't have mentors". And so we decided as a group to do a webinar so we can talk about these experiences and what changes we need to make. So we did this webinar and it was very empowering, and we're like, "Oh my gosh, this is really important". And so then we decided, let's write an article, so the four or five of us wrote an article on supporting nonbinary students in education. Anyways, yada, yada. Then all of a sudden I've written multiple papers on supporting trans and nonbinary graduate students because of that lived experience and saying "Okay well let's do something about it." And one thing as well that I started from all this momentum of how do we bring people together - because it's so meaningful to have community when you're very isolated in your programs - close to the end of my graduate training, maybe I was fifth year, fourth or fifth year or something, I decided to host a trans and nonbinary meet-up at APA. There was no committee for this or anything. I think I just said, "I wanna do this, so I'm going to host it". So, I just made a little flyer and attached it to the listserv, and I said: "Hey, trans and nonbinary people, we're gonna meet up at this bar in the hotel and we're just going to hang out". And so then, maybe there were like 10 people that came, still again, [it was] very very meaningful for us to meet each other. And then that evolved into a yearly thing and we're still doing it every year. Last year I want to say there were like 25 to 30 people there. But we ran out of chairs, so it's like growing, growing. Then, I decided to make Facebook groups for trans and non-binary students and professionals that quickly gained over 200 people. And I think people joining the group and saying: "What? There are like 200 other trans and nonbinary students in my field"?! **[1:02:54]** And that alone was helpful, and so then I felt like I can build this network and help people find each other. So that was not planned but kind of organically unfolded. But then, looking back, I'm glad that I was able to initiate that and help bring people

©Psychology's Feminist Voices 2026

together to form community, because that is what helps you succeed and get through these experiences.

LX: Right. It strikes me like the thought of, you know, if you create the space people will come.

EM: Exactly, yeah.

LX: Is really something that is sitting with me right now, and I think that it's something incredible that you see something that's kind of missing, and then smallest actions and smallest opportunities can really blossom into something that's so incredible for different people.

EM: Yeah, so I hope that I was hope…you know, when I was like graduating I knew of [only] like one or two other trans professors, at all in the field. So I've been trying to say like, "Okay, so how do we get more of us to survive these systems" because we need our voices and perspectives, and so trying to build those support systems to bring more people into our field and give opportunities for mentorship and community.

[Information added subsequent to interview]

I just want to highlight one other thing I thought of that I am most proud of. One of my biggest values is doing work that gives back to the community and so in our research lab, we have made it a goal to do at least one advocacy project per year as a lab. A few years ago, my students had the idea of hosting an event cantered on trans and nonbinary joy given how weighed down we were feeling from the increasingly hostile political climate. We hosted it in a beloved local bookstore. We were hopeful to get maybe 50 people to come, but to our surprise about 200 people attended. We were packed in between bookshelves and sitting on the floor. But it was so powerful and beautiful to see all of us trans and nonbinary people from all generations coming together in community. We've continued to expand and grow this event called, "Night of Trans and Nonbinary Joy" for the past three years. So while it's not "academic" and doesn't count for much in terms of my job, it's what I am most proud of, to create a space where trans and nonbinary people can be authentic, feel empowered, and feel loved.

[End of information added]

LX: Wow, that sounds like a beautiful event. So, I guess that kind of ties to one of the last questions which is: Where do you see the future of feminist psychology?

EM: Yeah.

LX: What has it accomplished? What remains to be done?

EM: Yes, yes. I think feminist psychology plays a critical role. I'm loving that a lot of the APA presidents and APA leaders are women who have roots in feminism. I think, you definitely bring attention to intersectionality, there's **[1:05:09]** probably still work to be done there, but there's been a lot of work I think especially with race, kind of weaving in women of color perspectives. But moving forward, I feel like, I hope that there is more connection, collaboration and coalition between trans communities and feminist communities because obviously there is so much overlap. Oppression that we experience is all coming from the gender binary, and trans communities are very impacted by

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

sexism and patriarchy, and maybe in similar ways as cis women and maybe in different ways. But I feel there often are different groups, so they're more siloed and, just in my experience within psychology, you know, it's like: "Oh, well if you want to work on trans issues, that's for division 44 and only if you want to work with issues that relate to cis-women, it's Division 35". That's just my feeling and perspective, so to be transparent, I was involved in Division 35 as a graduate student and I've gone to a few AWP conferences, but I felt unsure about how I belonged and how do I navigate the space as a nonbinary person, because there's very active assumptions that if you're involved in the Association for Women in Psychology, that you're a woman **[1:06:48]** and so just the name alone, where Division 35 is "psychology of women". And so, yeah, it's tricky because I've experienced a lot of sexism and often am perceived as a woman, and grew up being perceived as a woman, and I've gone through a lot of sexism, but I'm not a woman. And I've gone through different experiences being a gender nonconforming person. I just feel like to be completely transparent, honest, I think I would be more involved in feminist movements in psychology if we could attend to that dynamic. For example, in Division 35, I feel a little nervous talking about this because then it's like…anyways, I want to be honest about my experience.

LX: You can say anything **[1:07:50]**. So feel free [both laugh].

EM: To be completely honest about my experience because there's so many people that actively, feminist roles models, icons that I look up to, so many people involved in Division 35 or AWP that I adore and look up to. But, you know, there was a task force created in the last couple of years on how we can have trans inclusion, and there's only like one trans woman that I know of that is involved in Division 35. So they had this whole task force, and they had this idea: "Okay, let's change the name of Division 35 from 'Psychology of Women' to 'Intersectional Feminist Psychology'". And I was like I love this, because then we can bring in more people who share similar experiences, and we can work together, but they voted it down. So the leadership voted against it, this happened last year. So that really changes my perspective like "Okay, well am I going to be welcomed?" And so that's where I really hope in the future we can push. Because I understand that need to protect spaces for people with a similar experience. I totally understand that, I think there should be spaces for women, and I will happily not attend; I don't need to be included. But I think to completely silo communities is also a disservice because there is so much overlap and so many ways feminism can be pushed forward by trans and nonbinary people because we are literally breaking the binary down in so many ways. And so I feel like there's a missed opportunity to work together where we can still say, "Yeah we have different experiences and we can separate and have those different experiences but we can also come together". So that's my spiel, that's my hope. **[1:09:48]**

LX: I feel like this almost comes full circle, because it reminds me so much of your experience at the non-profit and doing those activities, where it's like there's so much to learn from people of very similar experiences, and there's so much to be learned being more inclusive, and being in dialogue with each other, and how we are navigating these shared systems of oppressions. And how we're all experiencing them in different and unique ways as well. There's so much opportunity for those more inclusive spaces to be engaged in that way.

EM: Yeah, and I feel like there's been a lot of grappling with race, like you know, women of colour have different experiences than white women, and they have shared experiences but different experiences, but of course, we can still come together.

LX: Right.

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026

EM: So I just wish there was [something] like that with trans communities as well, because trans women experience so much sexism, and we could come together, and of course, they have different experiences as well. But yeah, I just feel like, wow, we have these two different groups very impacted by sexism and patriarchy, and also feminism - really I think all oppressions are connected. **[1:11:11]** I think that a lot of feminists also believe in integrating that intersectional perspective. Yeah, I think it's just too bad…there's this kind of minority group of people who want to find womanhood based on this one singular experience. Yeah, anyways.

LX: Gives a much fuller perspective and a more holistic perspective, when we can all kind of come together and have that space to do so.

EM: Yeah.

LX: Instead of kind of breaking them all into it, feels so fragmented.

EM: Right. Yeah, and I think it's just like, it's both, we can separate and we can come together and we can have differences and similarities. But we can still work together.

LX: Right. 100%.

EM: Yeah.

LX: We have a few more minutes, I was wondering if there was anything else that we haven't gotten to talk about today, yet that you wanted to share?

EM: I'm just looking through …no, no I think we got through all the different spiels that I had.

LX: Amazing. Okay, in that case, I'm going to stop the recording.

EM: Okay.

END

©Psychology's Feminist Voices, 2026