

"Thoroughly Post-Modern Mary" [A Biographic Narrative Interview With Mary Gergen]

Appendix: Transcript of Tape Recorded Interview With Mary Gergen, Spring 2004

Kip Jones

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Kip JONES (on cassette tape, posted to Mary GERGEN): Today I'd like you to tell me the story of your life. You can start wherever you'd like and take as long as you'd like. All I ask is that you tell me your story without interruption. I won't be interrupting you because I'm not there. Um, so I hope you'll just start wherever you'd like and tell me the story of your life. Over to you. [1]

Mary GERGEN: (recording on cassette tape): Hi, Kip. I am starting at 7:56 on a Tuesday evening here in Wallingford, and I look back to see that this is something that you will be working with students on and that you will hope to place in the ah, electronic journal, run by Katja and Günter in Germany, for an international audience. Um, as an imminent psychologist, and I think ah, that's ah term far beyond what I would deserve or even hope to deserve, um but taking all of these things into account, um, it makes me want to shape my narrative in certain ways and not in other ways. Um, it's a challenge when you are a narrative ah, theorist to go about doing life story when you realize that there are many life stories that could be told and you have given me a rather broad pallet of/or a broad canvas on which I can paint the story of my life. [2]

Um, (1) [*numbers in (parentheses) represent pauses in seconds; numbers in [brackets] are paragraph numbers*] perhaps um, I will change my um, my perspective from time to time in this narrative as I go from ah childhood to adulthood. And I suppose that I could do it thematically but it's also very compelling to do it chronologically. [3]

I was thinking about it yesterday since I started to (1) um, work with this tape recorder and see if everything was going right and I couldn't help but wanna start back before my birth to create a setting for myself within a family and also within a generation and within a historical period and within a particular place. Because I think all of these things have added together to create aspects of who I am as a psychologist and ah, a person. [4]

I guess that I want you to remember the movie, "The Last Picture Show." I hope you have seen that movie, but perhaps you will recall that there is a Main Street. Now this one is in Texas and is a lot drier and bleaker, but this is the block, the town with the picture show and with one block of ah, stores on either side of a very wide street, I guess symbol of great hopes for a metropolis ah, but it's a village with seven hundred and thirteen people in it. It's by a beautiful lake called Lake Balaton and the town is called Balaton. I didn't realize 'til I was an adult it was named after a Hungarian lake and um, as far as I know there was never a

Hungarian within a 100 miles of Balaton. Balaton had a grain elevator, fact three of them, at the end of this street there was a park with a bandstand, and then there were the railroad tracks and the elevators. And the elevators contained grain and grain was the principle ah, export of the farming communities around this rural town in south-western Minnesota. There was Laura Ingles WILDER, a writer who wrote stories about a family who lived in Minnesota in the 1800's and the most famous book was called "The Little House on the Prairie." And I identify with that kind of locale. [5]

As an adult I greatly appreciate all the advantages growing up in such a little town provided me. Although when I was a child there were periods of time where I was quite bored, but I will save that for later. [6]

The inhabitants of this town were (1) very diverse. Either you were a German Lutheran or a Swedish Lutheran. And uh my family roots were in the Swedish Lutheran side of the town. And in fact my great grandparents founded the Swedish Lutheran Church in Balaton. Their daughter, Ida, was my grandmother and she married a Swedish immigrant who had come as an indentured servant to escape the hardships of Sweden and had eventually moved to Balaton. [7]

Um, when I was born my grandfather, Martin GRANBERG had become a partner in what became a flourishing business the Chevrolet dealership and the Chevrolet and affiliated garage. My grandfather was a partner with Nels MILLER, who ran the dealership and my grandfather basically, ran the garage. Um, he ah was a prosperous citizen of the town and managed to buy land outside of town that he would then lease to um, farmers who would then give him money for that and also from the garage. Uhm, but, I never paid any attention really to money and financial well being, it was a town in which I felt perfectly comfortable and safe and issues of ethnicity barely surfaced of racial difference never occurred, because there was none and um, and where um social class meant absolutely nothing to me. [8]

Um, anyway at any rate, um, I'll go (3) [*soft laughter*] ... My grandfather and grandmother had four children, my Uncle Harold, the oldest who never married and who always considered me his special niece, um, my mother Ellen Vivian GRANBERG, who was the second child, Aunt Violet and Uncle Bill. And, um, my mother when she was in High School met the traveling sales man who would come through town and who was for a while, perhaps living there, I don't know, and she really had a "catch" in some ways because my father in the depths of the depression had graduated from college, a Catholic college in Saint ... called Saint Mary's in Wynona Minnesota. He was the seventh of eight children of a person, ah, my grandmother who was Annie Stork McCANNEY. She was of German ancestry and she had married an Irish man and he had died along with two of their sons in the great flu epidemic of the 1918 or so, and also a daughter had died, named Jane of tuberculosis. Their family must have been fairly poor given that all these people had died and my father was sent by the priest to St. Mary's perhaps with visions that he might become a priest. He had hoped to become a Lawyer, but in 1934 when he graduated from college the best thing he could do to

survive was to start to sell newspapers and magazines. Traveling around from town to town in Minnesota, um, sometimes having to trade chickens for newspapers, he kept a cage, apparently in the back of his car so he could trade chickens for newspapers and sell things and then trade in the chickens or eat the chickens, I don't know what he did with the chickens. Um, but any rate he ah, started to go with my mother and they eventually married. Um, this was a secret until I was 20 years old, but my mother, who was 18, became pregnant before the marriage, I think on St. Patrick's Day, actually. And my father, um and my mother were married when he was 29 and she was 18. Quite a large age gap between them. And um, I don't know what my father was doing in the seven years after he graduated from college, and before he married my mother. Um, my mother said once, he was engaged to someone and I'm never was sure, once I found out about all of this, whether he had planned to marry my mother, but I am inclined to think so. They had a very happy, peaceful marriage. The authority structure, I think between them was always, (1) Dad was the "boss," and Mom was the respectful and respected wife. [9]

Um, my Mom worked one day in her life, um, she worked um, in a department store in the notions house wares, but when she asked another clerk to put her finger on the bow so she could tie a package for a customer and received a not very nice response, she quit. So, that was her working career. She was a volunteer all her life and worked very hard in the Lutheran Church. [10]

Now, my father as I said was Catholic and for them to be married in June of 1938, she had to agree to sign over any children to become Catholic to be raised as Catholic, they were not allowed to be married in a church, but in the sanctuary, because she was a Protestant and all during my childhood I was really not allowed to go in the Protestant Church, although on Christmas I was allowed to be in the Christmas program as some kind of concession to the fact that the whole community was Lutheran and my father, my sister and I were the only Catholics in that town. I think that it's kind of important that that was the case. The Dentist and his family were also Catholic. So, when I was growing up, the most educated people in the town, (1) outside of the Superintendent of Schools and some of the teachers and the principal and some of the ministers, uh, tha/that my family, my father and the dentist were the some of the most educated people. So, I was always very proud in a way to be a Catholic and to be sort of different and to have my father, who I thought of as nearly the most intelligent, rational, kind, but, but formal in a way, um father he was an old fashion father, he didn't do a lot of playing with us and the things that fathers do now. He didn't go grocery shopping. Um, he was the bread winner and my mother was the nurturer and the caretaker. And I think I have to say that in my growing up years it was my father who was the intellect and the one I most admired in that respect, and who I most wanted to please and my mother was somebody that I felt I had some superiority over an/and yet I loved her and she loved me. It was just who she was, and who I was. [11]

I haven't mentioned that my sister was born in 1940 and in some ways we were like two little brown skinned, black haired, not black haired, brown haired, dark

brown haired, green eyed siblings of very close natures. There were not much space and time between us and we were always together, my mother use to dress us in very similar, or even the same clothes. Um, (1) but I was the big sister and she was the little sister, and I had a different personality from hers, um, she was kind of disagreeable and feisty and stubborn. She even ran away when she was four years old and she was like a very un/in/flexible kid and she would be punished rather than to apologize for something she didn't think was wrong and so forth, I was the politician and the negotiator and ah, the one who could get along just fine with everyone. Um, and ah my mother appreciated that a lot. [12]

At any rate, uhm, physically my mother was lighter skinned and lighter brown hair and green eyes, smallish (uhm) and pretty and very young, and I always ah, took a certain pride in how pretty and young she was in the course of the world. My father was handsome, athletic, dark skinned, dark black hair, brilliant blue eyes, (1) um, but not a big guy, kind of more medium sized (1) guy. [13]

Um, one of the themes that I think is very important in my childhood was the presence, the omni presence of the war. From any memories I had from my early childhood through first grade, um, the war was part of it. And, what difference did that make? Well, everything in that small town was orientated toward the absence of the sons and the (uhm) remembrance of these people because, everybody knew everybody. My Uncle Harold, my Uncle Arnie who married Violet, and my Uncle Bill all went in the Navy. My father was just old enough that he wasn't drafted, even though they kept expanding the draft and it made for certain in town, because he looked young enough to be drafted, but he wasn't, so, he got to stay at home; the farm boys also got to stay at home, and there was a certain tension there about that, but, I didn't experience that, what I experienced was the radio on every night and listening in my grandpa's house to ah, to how many Japanese ships had been sunk and planes had been brought down and progress and Germany and the tanks, and I kept thinking "well, they got to run out, they got to run out, soon it will be over." Every night I had a long list of prayers that I had to pray for people. I had to pray for my Uncle Henry, that I didn't know and Uncle Sy who was not even our uncle, and whoever my parents wanted me to add to the list. We had rationing and I remember Mother getting mad cause Jane and I played with the rationing coupons and ah, because there was gas rationing, my father and my sister and I could not go to Mass (2) we could go to Mass sometimes, but not often and we had to drive 12 miles away to go to Mass. So, my father basically did our Sunday school, and I remember sitting on his lap learning about the bible, learning the Mass, learning about the Saints and then he would read me (uhm) the comics in the newspaper. And I think, that's how I learned to read, because I can't remember learning to read. I just could read. I still read the comics. I'm trying to give 'em up a bit because I have so much work, but I still do and the newspaper is still important. And we subscribed always, my father worked for the Minneapolis Star and Tribune his entire career, and retired in ah, when he was 65. [14]

When I was 12 we had to moved to Minneapolis because he had been promoted and promoted so he that he had an excellent job in the circulation department by

the time he retired. He also, when he retired, became in charge of the scholarship program for paperboys and he managed the scholarship program that was organized and, I think he liked that, because it was a chance to work with young people and to be in charge of a project. Um, I don't think he ever got the kind of job and the recognition that he really deserved because he was not very self-promoting and I think that was a problem; we use to argue about that, in fact. Um, but he was a sexist, I have to say, in some ways. For example, I remember having this argument about why there weren't papergirls and he said, "It was because boys had to learn to manage money and manage their careers because they were going to work in the world while women were going to stay at home." And um, I don't know where my feminism came from but, there was a resistance I had to these sorts of things. Ah, maybe, another part of it was that when I was a little girl, um, (1) several things, one, I was in a little group of children that were all born at the same time and there were four boys and me. So, there was that kind of connection. And then, I was the oldest grandchild as well as the oldest child and after me I was the oldest of seven grandchildren. My sister was next to me and then they went on. And, so I was in this family where I was the oldest and the oldest girl, and there were two younger girls and then the rest were these little boys. So, I never had this sort of inordinate respect for boys my age or younger. And ah, it showed in different ways and their like playing this school game like boys catch the girls or something, I'd never let anybody catch me, and I'd never let anybody kiss me. I would never ... I would never compromise myself just to be caught and kissed and I had distain for the girls who did. Consequently, I was never kissed, but I had a lot of struggles! [15]

I also (1) was (1) one of the best students in our class and we had a really great extraordinary class of kids and um, I remember in 5th grade, we had this contest, like girls against the boys in Social Studies and ah, I after a while was the only girl left standing and I had to answer every other question and there'd be like three boys and two boys and one boy, and I'd have to say in the last analysis, Donnie HILQUIST beat me, but I had to stand off the other five boys for quite a while myself. I don't wanna say that I was like phhhhttt ... head and shoulders above every body else, cause I wasn't, but, I loved school, it was my home um, we lived across the street, um, it was fun on snow days when the buses couldn't come in from the country and there'd just be me and couple other kids and the teacher and it was a day you could do anything, and um I loved school and I liked to play school. [16]

One of the things that was exciting and was part of the whole war thing was um, my father took on additional duties in town (1), as a result from not being drafted and he became the baseball coach and the basketball coach and the science teacher in school. So, Dad and I went off to school when I was in first grade, and ah he was there and I remember going to a basketball game and my little pony/er/ pigtailed with red, white and blue ribbons and I went out on the basketball floor and I skipped around the floor like I owned the place cause my dad was the coach. Uh, unfortunately, the basketball players started to come out when I was half way round the floor and I ran skittering back to my seat sort of terrified by these big boys and the ball and sort of lost a little of my uhm exuberance at my

performance. But I do think that I had this real sense of ownership and belonging and ah, you know that I was somebody in this little town. [17]

Uh, then uh (2) we had to leave, it was very hard. No! it wasn't hard, I was looking forward to it, I thought it would great, I thought it would be like Balaton, only bigger. And I must say that I had become bored in Balaton. Uhm, first of all, there was, there was nothing very interesting going on and it was all family centered with all these little kids and there wasn't a lot of things to read in my grandfather's house, and some how I think because my grandmother had a stroke and became ill, all through my elementary school. Um, we were there a lot and the only magazine was called "*The Country Gentleman*." My mom did though do two things that were great. One is got me a subscription to *Jack and Jill*. And two, she got (sigh) heavenly days, allowed me to have a subscription to *Modern Screen*! And I started to collect movie star pictures, and the only relief I had in a way from every day boredom, especially in the summer when there was just swimming was to go to the movies. Oh, yeah, and I had piano lessons too, but, I went to the movies and on Saturday afternoons, I went to the western cartoons, westerns. And on Sunday afternoons I went to the romance, the musicals, the dramas, that's how it was set up, and that was the most wonderful time of my week. And I had special favorites, I know all the movie stars from that era and I had a scrap book, I would write to the movie stars and I'd get their pictures, their autographed pictures, it was like my special collection. Um, and the other thing that I did which was my first publication was that because my grandmother was ill, they brought in uh a Latvian mother and child to come and live at my grandfather's house. And I got to know that little girl (1), who was 6, I musta been 10, and I helped her to learn English and I helped her to learn to read, and I helped her to learn to adjust to our country. And then I wrote a little story about that for *Jack and Jill*, which was published. So, that was kind of exciting. [18]

Anyway, we moved to Minneapolis. I had the worse year of my life. It was absolutely the worse. I was a ... hick. I didn't know clothes, I didn't know cashmere, I didn't know Roger Van Ess bags. These girls were girly girls. They played jacks, skipped rope, and sat around and they even started to like boys. They went to proms, little Job's daughters, formal things with boys in 8th grade. They started having boy/girl parties. I didn't have a clue about fashion. And I got lost in the 7th through 12th big high school, and there I am, ya know, 4'11", 4'10" under y'know 90 pounds, not then. I was always a little chunky you might say. But, honest to god, like from the farm. Well, my mother use to say, "we were not from the farm, we were from the town," and she didn't like us to talk about being from the farm, but really, compared to those girls, I certainly was. It was a fairly wealthy suburb that we had moved to. My parents wanted a good school system, it was really good, it was St. Louis Park High School. It was one of the places where Jewish people could move to in the suburbs because it was restricted housing and there was discrimination against Jewish people so all the Jewish successful people lived in my town. Part of the reason that our school was good was because they were good students. I didn't really know that they were Jewish, but that was what I learned and discovered later and it's where the COHEN Brothers came from, if you know the movies by the COHEN's. It's not a great

suburb, but a ... there was one, Eugena, which was a better suburb, but they couldn't live there. Neither could we, we couldn't afford it. [19]

Um, at any rate, um (1) I made a novena. I saw a little piece of paper in church that said if you did certain things for 9 Tuesdays in a row, you could have your wish come true and so I made the wish to move back to Balaton. But, after 9 Sundays or Tuesdays, um, my novena was answered, my prayers were answered, but by that time I had started to make friends, I had found my way around, I'd stopped crying (1) and shaking and (2) my mother was really worried about me, because I wasn't myself. My sister beat up all the boys in her 5th grade, that's how she dealt with it. And I became friends with a group that became a popular group. I joined the sort of not goody-good popular group, and I stayed with those people all through high school, and, it was a great, it became a great time. And, one of the things that happened was I *finally* got interested in, confident enough to like boys, and my body changed and I became um, a lot more attractive and never really fashionable, but certainly trying and, um (1) I suddenly could have boyfriends. I could have any boy I wanted and I ran through them. It wasn't very nice, but I didn't quite understand about dating and ah, and I had ah, I had um, my first kiss the end of 9th grade, 15, it wasn't a great kiss, but at least I'd been kissed and ah, I was I had a well rounded life, I was in activities, I was getting some of the best grades and um, but I didn't, that wasn't the centre of my life to get good grades; the centre of my life was sort of to be socially successful. And uh in 10th grade, I um, manage to sort of go steady with a basketball player who was a senior, and this became my steady "beau" for the next three years, ah 10th, 11th, 12th grade and um (1), that was ya know, I had a great time and was in the newspaper, and drama classes and plays and ah (1), I also worked. I always worked and earned money to I could have what I wanted, because my parents never could quite get with the program, that we were in a wealthy suburb where girls wore good clothes. So, I was a car-hop, uh just like in American Graffiti, only no roller skates. Uhm, I started out as a baby sitter when I was 12 and I cleaned houses, then I became a car-hop, then I got on the Teen Board which was a kind of modeling of pretty girl sell clothes at the local department store. I didn't like/I liked the modeling okay, but I didn't really like having to be a slave to the/to the (2) department store. But I earned money and I got commission in the summertime, so I made a lot of money and that was all to the good. [20]

Well because of my boyfriend, I didn't really explore colleges the way I shoulda, and I didn't want to go to a Catholic girls' school, which my father popped on me that he wanted me to do that and I'd also become reluctant as a Catholic, partly cause my boyfriend was a Lutheran, all the kids I hung out with tended to be protestants. Um, and ah, or not Catholics' anyway, some were Jewish and um, (1) and I had sort of had my Catholicism broken for me, back when I was in junior high, ah no, when I was in grade school even when one Sunday my father said I couldn't go to the movies. Why? "Forever Amber," it was on the forbidden list of the Catholic League of Decency and I really fought him for that because I didn't know what it was but I went to the movies ever Sunday and he wouldn't let me go and I thought "I don't like that." And then when I was in junior high you had to

stand up and proclaim in church that you would not read any books or see any movies that the Catholic Church forbade and that really broke its back for me. I was a religious girl and I believed in everything and I wanted to be good and I (1) ya know, was in a religious world that way and it was very hard on me that I didn't know what to do about my Catholicism versus my boyfriend's Lutheranism and his (1) father wanted to forbid him from seeing me because I was Catholic, I mean that was a big issue in those days. And, so I was in my heart kinda becoming more (1) unclear about the church, but I didn't really see myself as leaving it. [21]

At any rate, I went to the University of Minnesota; I had ah sorta scored out of a lot the, like the English class and I was in a special treatment, in a way, because I was ah a gifted student. But, ah again, social life was just as important as getting good grades and in the end of my Freshman year, I finally broke up with my boyfriend, not because there was anything at all wrong with him but I was so sick of being tied down and I just went on a spree and had a really good time and felt free and joined a sorority in my sophomore year and dedicated myself to the sorority which helped me really to finish college, to do very well because they were the outstanding academic sorority on campus and all of us had to pull our weight (1) to make sure we stayed No.1. And that was really the reason that I tried to do so much to excel in college. Um, In my senior year (1) I got engaged and ah, (1) to an architectural student and ah (1), and we were gonna get married and yet, I wanted to continue my education and I went to my adviser and I asked him what kind of educational opportunities I could be involved in and he said, "You're Catholic aren't you?" and I say "Yes," and he said, "Well, go home and have your babies," Uh that's the most sexist, limiting conversation I ever had and I was like his top student and that's what he said to me. Well! phhht, unfortunately, he was right and I did go home and I was married in June, I was pregnant in July and had my first child the following April. Ah, Lisa, and ah then 18 months later I had my second child, a little boy Michael and I do have to say my experience of pregnancy and the delivery of my first child (1) was really, (1) I mean, I don't know, peak experience would be a good term for it. And what was so peak about it, was not only the result, I hated labor, I mean, give me a break, who likes labor? But, that delivery room itself, I have never been so focused and so (1) non-reflective, I didn't have any outside voice lookin' at me, I didn't ... I was in it. I was a 110% in, and it was something that doesn't happen to me very often, and ah it's a wonderful experience, um I also had it with my second child, but I wasn't so amazed that I had that experience. Uhm, but anyway uhm that was worth noting. [22]

While I was pregnant and while I was more or less staying at home I started to go back to graduate school and during the course of this seven or so years, I picked up a Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology. (1) And, um then um, my husband had um, (1) he was ah, a fast track architect, architecture was his whole life. I mean our whole life was centered on architecture and on architect and um, we had a really good time, at that time with that community. He was on the track for the Prix de Rome and we were going to go to Rome to live, and I was real excited about that because although I had wanted to go to Europe at various

times, there never was the money for it; I don't think there was the interest in my parent's part that I go to Europe; they let my sister go, later after me, but I never had gone, and I thought "Well, that's going to be amazing," and um, we got to New York, (1) the second time I'd ever been there, and um, the committee decided that my husband should go to Boston to MIT, he was artistic enough, he needed more technology and they literally called Boston and talked to CATALANO, who was the Dean at the School of Architecture at MIT and said that "We're sending Michael to you and um, fix him up with a scholarship and ah, y'know his wife and kids to come" and that's what happened. And um, the other guy who was a competitor from Minnesota, also, um was ah, Bill PETERSON, who is now one of the major architects in New York, he worked for I. M. PEI for a while, he went on but it was an incredible crowd that we hung out with and then we ended up in Boston, and that's when I got a job working at Harvard for Ken GERGEN and the reason that I got a job was that he had a friend who was an architect who was our friend, and there was a Halloween party and we were invited to this Halloween party and when I came in, in 1965 people were saying that Ken and his wife had come as psychological concepts and what were these concepts? And I found out and told people what the concepts were and it was rather appropriate and suggestive of his marriage, which was he had come as the ID and she had come as the Super Ego. [23]

Um, so I meet Ken that night and found out that he had an opening for a Research Assistant, he had just gotten a grant, and we sat on the stairs and had this conversation that was marvelous. It was really on the social construction of pain. And though he was an experimental social psychologist at the time, he was arguing with me that he could make people feel pain as pleasure. And, that was our conversation. And later that night we did some Greek dancing together and I have to say that despite the fact that I was in a perfectly okay marriage (1) with a person who was highly talented and a nice guy, who was not exactly on my wave length because his wave length was architecture and mine was more intellectual that I have to say in some way I fell in love with Ken that night. I also noticed that every other woman at the party seemed to be in love with him too. And so that was ah, an interesting observation on my part. [24]

At any rate, I began working part-time for Ken in the SOCREL social relations department, William JAMES Hall, Harvard University, and man! that was quite a thrill for me. One of the things that happened I didn't actually have my Masters degree. I had finished my work, but I hadn't finished my dissertation, my Masters thesis and ah, and that was one of the things that Ken encouraged me to do, and ah, in some ways helped me to sort of get it all together; I had all my information and everything under my bed in a box and he was the one that got me to get it all together. So, for the next two years I worked with Ken at Harvard. Then he took a job at Swarthmore and moved to Swarthmore; I continued on at Harvard for another year, working in the Business School for a Marketing Professor and during that time I started to learn how to do computer things, it just came after working on hand calculators doing research background stuff and helping to create experiments and doing library research and um the range of things that research assistants did in those days. And, I started to learn to do different kinds

of computer uhm data analysis and ah, became sort of a valuable ally uhm to my employers. And it was wonderful at Harvard, the most amazing catalogue of people were there, and I took advantage of some of these things and got a second education, if you will. I attended Ken's social psych class. I attended a class in group dynamics, because that was very big at that time. Um, and I also attended some classes that Eric ERIKSSON was holding, um in ah, one of the rooms. David RIESMAN was there on the floor. The amazing opportunities for inter-actions with all sorts of fabulous people. Every Friday there was a cocktail hour up on the 15th floor and it mingled everybody except SKINNER's floor was invited for some reason. Jerry BRUNER was there, HOMANS, PARSONS, Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology uhm it was really a wonderful mixture of people and it made me hungry to be more, to do more, to have more, to know more and to participate more fully because I have to say that the down side was the east coast coldness, snobbery, "who are you," "what are you," "where did you come from" inflicted itself upon me and um, I use to be hurt when people I knew from my classes, when I wasn't working ya know, would pass by me on the street or in front of William JAMES Hall engrossed in conversation and they wouldn't bother to say "Hi." Um, now having lived on the east coast every since, I understand that that is more of a Midwestern thing and especially a small town thing, and Ken says I always pull the small Midwestern girl, (1) ya know, attitudes every now and then, and it's kinda outdated, given the fact I've been living city life and east coast life for so many years. [25]

So, meanwhile uhm (1) for various things that I don't think have anything to do with becoming an eminent psychologist, um, um, my marriage ah, began to end and his marriage began to end, and ah at the culmination of the endings, Ken had won a Guggenheim Fellowship to Rome, and he ah, and I and my two children left together on a ship for Rome in August of 1968. And we went and lived in Italy; it was the time of great social upheaval. The institute where Ken was suppose to work, ah, was closed all year. And we worked at home and played and um raised the children. They loved Ken, they treated him like a Father from the first days, and that whole issue was totally fine. Um, certainly I had some guilt at separating them from their father, but because he was never really involved with them anyway, that wasn't so bad. Um, he missed me but (1) I was better off and I have never really regretted my choice. It was harder on Ken because he had to leave behind two adorable children that he had been very close with. Um, I have to say that now that our families are, have been blended for almost 30 years, it worked out well, the children love each other, we all love each other and that's not an issue that I'm going to need to go into, ah anymore for this. [26]

Um, well I became more and more involved with Ken's work and um, was his helpmate basically. And when we came back to the States we moved into a little house that we could afford since half of his income was going to alimony and child support. And um, we had no furniture; we slept in a sleeping bag for ah the first year that we were back. And, ah he had written grants, so that I could start to work for him, and that is what I started to do. And, we did all sorts of interesting things, it was the 60's, the late 60's, the early 70's and we did some anti-war protest work and [laughter] we followed out all sorts of strange esoteric

experimental work, ah including the dark room study where we put people in a dark room and tried de-individuation, only in the positive scale of things. Some kids did stuff on auras and marijuana used. I mean it was a crazy time and there was a lot of anti-war activity going on at Swarthmore and we were involved in it. And, ah students and faculty mingled and had parties and resistance talks and we did this survey, an anti-war survey that ah showed that the really intellectually gifted and intelligent and good student kids, especially in the social sciences and humanities were against the war, and all trying to re-figure who it was that was against the war as good kids instead of just derelict drop-out potheads. And we were published in Time magazine and we went to Washington and tried to show people in the government that this is what was happening and did our best to try to do this, ah anti-war work. Uhm we had started to drift away from direct experimentation, um Ken wrote his famous social psychologist history piece uhm in '73 and in '78 I think he published something against experimentation. And we were working together doing various things um, but I was ah, I was starting to get edgy in the mid '70's, early '70's that I didn't have a PhD, and Ken coulda cared less. I mean he was totally accepting of me and thought I was fine, no matter what but, I um, I remember going to a APA meeting and starting to ah (1) I had a big crying jag in the car, before we got to Toronto or wherever the APA was, because I felt like I just have got to have more (1) status, I have to have more independence, I have to have my own PhD, ah, more and more women were going on for further education and I saw myself as being in a secondary role in this no where land. And um, so for (1) it was/for those reasons and who knows uhm I decided I wanted to get a PhD [*heavy sigh*] and I just thought I'd ya know, kinda do it with my left hand because the right hand had kids and house and work, ah, so I wrote to Penn and Temple being in the city that we're in, and it happened at Temple that someone had just dropped out of the social psych program, and they took me, they gave me advanced credits for my Masters and I started to become a graduate student at Temple University in 1974. Um, by the way in 1972 and 1973 we went away to Japan and lived for a year, and ah, oh! And ah, I was a research assistant again, and we worked together in Japan and um, also had a very interesting time of course. I forgot to say we did get married in October of 1969. [27]

Uh, okay, so then I started graduate school and um, I worked my way up and in and ah, I knew all the Professors there from earlier relationships and um, by the time, I think it was ah, I started maybe in '73 and in '74 I started teaching there. I was shocked! Because I had been an assistant, and I thought I was gonna be an assistant but, ah, because of my advanced standing and my maturity and their need for cheap labor I guess. I taught a social psych and an intro psych class starting in the fall of '74. Um, so I finished my course work and I dabble in this side of social and that side of social, but because we were moving together away from traditional experimental social psychology, um I was getting less and less interested in finding an experimental niche to fit into. At any rate uhm in 1976-77, we spent the year in Paris and ah became familiar with French Psychology, social psychology. We were with Erica APFELBAUM; we became friendly with Serge MOSCOVICI. Ken supervised the dissertation of Verena AEBISCHER who became a close personal friend every since. Um, there were various

engagements that we had with all sorts of Parisians, and I must say at that time, there was still a lot of hostility toward the United States and anti-Americanism in France, (1) so that was part of our life as well. But, ah we had ah (1), a very intellectually rich time in France. [28]

And when we came back I was working on my dissertation and um, becoming more and more sort of (1) separated from Ken. I wasn't working for him anymore/ separated from him in a sense of not being sort of his (1), his assistant. Because we thought that I would never grow into an autonomous um, kind of more peer (2) with him until I could establish some separate ground. It was (1) It (1) I (1) if I saw myself ah, developing it would be like first under his wing and then as a helper and then totally separating and going off doing other things and then coming back again. But coming back again with a new kind of synthesis between us. In some sense I don't think that I'm ever gonna um, be his full equal because he works so hard, he is so concentrated, he is so networked and he is so committed to this thing. I mean the gender issue plays out here because he was brought up to believe most of the meaning in his life was gonna be in the yearbook in the sky and how many publications he had, I guess. Um, or citation index ratings and I was never ... for me, my work and what I do and what I think is a form of pleasure. And I'm not so invested in status or money or careerism, and consequently I have very little fear, I take risks that Ken's always afraid of for me. I do crazy stuff and um in a way each of us is always amazing the other, and ah, I don't think I could have done that without this period, if you will, of separation. Not, emotionally or personal separation, but finding paths, finding relationships, finding ways of learning that we're different and separated, but also feeding back to Ken in a new way. Um, I think I've always been a scout in our relationship, and (1) ya know, sort of coming back from the frontiers of various places I've been and sharing with him the news from my frontiers. He, of course is exploring other frontiers and bringing that back as well. [29]

Um, so (1) I loved my life at Temple, um I had an office, I had a course load, I met a lot of interesting people and students and um, um, and I did of kind of interesting things, but not what I call really interesting things. I think that my dissertation, which was using um, using as my population elderly people, and really I was more in a cognitivist as oppose to a constructionist zone and um, so I was looking at attributions I thought, but, now if I were to re-say what my dissertation was about, uhm it was about socially constructing one's relationship to one's social world and what I discovered in my dissertation, if I can use that word was that people who said that they choose to relinquish certain activities and all the questions were about relinquishing activities, so it was set up to be kind of a negative thing, when they said "I choose to relinquish" they were in much better shape, than people who said "I was forced to, or because of my age, or because of my ill health or because, ya know what else could I do?," so people expressed themselves as agentic and as full of choice and decision making, they were much happier and more satisfied with life, and seemed to be in better physical shape. Um, I loved doing that research and I had some help, and Ken's research grant helped provide some research assistance for me to do interviews with a variety of older people, both in their own homes and in different residential

settings. The reason I think now about that is that one of the projects that is very meaningful to me now, is this positive ageing newsletter that we are uhm creating together and the whole idea is to re-construct the notion of ageing so that it becomes a positive generative time of life and we're doing all sorts of things and having very positive impacts, if we can use that as a verb, on people today. So, I got my dissertation, I got my PhD, but I didn't want to take a job just any where/I didn't want to upset the fantastic personal life and Swarthmore life and community life, and kid life that we had right here. And, I was not going to travel half way across the state for a good job in social psychology; most of all I cared about my life and second of all about where I had my job. [30]

Well, it was hard to get a job; I was out in the field and in the (1) three and a half years or so, four years maybe that I didn't have an academic job I worked for AT&T. This is when it was the big conglomerate, endless amounts of money and we were doing a longitudinal research on managers lives, and this sort of brought back to me my work at the Business School, it gave me some more experience there, it also brought to the forefront my counseling background experience and um, and so I'd joined this team; I was the first woman that they had ever hired and I loved my work, it was going around in Pennsylvania, Colorado, Minnesota, um, phhhffffff, I don't know where else I went, Washington, DC? Interviewing um, the managers ah, in AT&T and uhm the Bell Companies all around the country side and finding out about their personal lives, their professional lives, they took batteries of tests. I interviewed on the telephone, I interviewed in person. I mean sometimes it would get a little dull, but I got paid a lot of money to do this, and sometimes I would do workshops basically, where we would um involve people in different activities and um, evaluate them, as managers. Uhm and it was very interesting and very well paid and they liked me and I liked them and I got an exposure to the corporate world in a way, as well. And I also in Minnesota got to see my family, which I also enjoyed, and in Colorado I got to see the mountains and ... I love getting on airplanes with my briefcase and being an ah, ya know sorta hot-shot consultant for AT&T, that was kinda of fun. It wasn't very growthful after a way and I was so happy when I finally got the exact job I wanted, which was to be in the Psych Department at Penn State University and to teach at a Campus 15 minutes from my house, and that's where I've been for the last 20 years. I went through the ranks assistant professor, associate professor, full professor. It isn't so easy to do at a campus where the teaching load is quite heavy and we don't have a lot of ah research funds and ah ... so my research had to be geared toward that environment and those restrictions. Um, so teaching is important, I enjoy it, it's fun, I can tell from what I am saying that I am kind of an exhibitionist and I'm very social and out-going and I enjoy ah being in front of the classroom, but I also enjoy the kind of pedagogy that's not about lecturing so much, as it is about getting people involved in their own development and their own discussions and in everyone of my classes I have action assignments where they have to go out in the world and grapple with things, and try to apply the theory and the research from school settings and um to really expose themselves emotionally and embodying ways. And I have very strong feelings about pedagogy and how it should go about and I'm very interested always in creating

in my classes that kind of dynamic. Not everyday, not every way, but that's my ideal. [31]

Uhm I also became a Professor in Women Studies, and I became interested in being a part of women studies and when I found my own niche, the niche was this intersection of feminist theory and social constructionism. And [light laughter] at that intersection, ya know, you can almost count in United States on one hand, who else is in that point but, it's so exciting, it has so many ramifications for understanding feminism and gender relations and the politics of women's issues and gender issues and so I'm very thrilled now to be doing teaching in that area and I'm ...have a feminist theory class and all my writing that's been on my own has been related to this intersection. In 1988 I did (1) ah 1987 I did a conference, I did it single handily really, and I think it made me sick, but um on the influences of feminism and various academic uh worlds and um, and I made a book out of it and I put a section in there which was about feminist approaches to research, um I um wrote a book that was published more recently that was a combination of different papers I've done which have been on different forms of feminism and how to do post-modern feminist research in a kind of social-constructionist vein. Uh I started playing around with writing styles, I don't know when and I guess in ah, '92 I published a paper where I wanted to sort of take the narrative work we've been doing together in the '80's and sort of dismantling narratives and so ripping up the papers so that there were ribbons text, different col ..., not colors, but different fonts and lines and intersecting other voices, making my paper poly-vocal and the voices of the people I was studying, the autobiographies I was studying, and just being kind of daring about it. [32]

Um, in 1988-9 (1) my husband and I both went to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study and I remember walking in that door of that place thinking, "Oh my Lord, I am unworthy." I mean it sounds like to ol' Catholic girl, ya know, "I'm unworthy to be in this place with all these fantastic people," and by the end of the year, I could walk out and feel like I belonged. In a way, because I was older when I started, I gave myself credit to be 38 years old like everybody else instead of 50, or whatever I was. And, all my friends there were 38 too. And Ken spent a long time that year being in Heidelberg, because he had won some fantastic prize and I was sort of on my own there in the Netherlands (1) for many weeks and I did all sorts of papers and accomplished a great deal on my own, it was kind of the finishing school for me, so that I could be free in a sense to do whatever and I guess one of the things that I, (whoooooa do I ever feel full of myself here, on a roll!) I'm a little embarrassed if I think about this enthusiasm that I'm expressing I had a great year, and I want to share that. But, one time I got all upset about a paper I read, and Ken wasn't there to talk to and I think I'd be a lot more productive if I didn't always dump everything on him and say, "This is interesting, and I like this ... did you notice that?" Even back when I was at Temple, by the way, in my graduate work I attended a philosophical seminar for philosophers by Joseph MARGOLIS and he had a book that was called, "The Philosophy of the Social Sciences," and I believe that book and the seminar itself had a great impact on Ken's sort of development as a social constructionist. But anyway, so I couldn't talk to him and so I sat down at the computer and I wrote this

performance piece, and I had never done anything like that, but it was full of all sorts of double entendres, if you see my book that came out um, ah Feminist Reconstructions in Psychology Narrative Gender and Performance, the very last piece in it, I think is called something post-modern mama, I called the piece. And, I just wrote it and we were going to a conference in Denmark and it was on post-modernism and psychology, and this was my presentation and we were in Munich and I had to buy a ten foot long red boa, and I wore a costume because I wanted it to embodied in feminism, so I wore heels and a red boa and I presented this piece which didn't make sense to anybody hardly, but it had the soul of post-modernism in it, and it was the first performance piece that I had done and uh, so that opened a lot of doors. And at the same time Ken was getting into performance and he just does marvelous things in performance, he's a real comedian, actually. Uh another side of him that came out and so we do these sort of comic philosophical, psychological routines and ah, and sometimes we sing and he plays the banjo and there's no stopping us, sort of craziness that we can get into, but serious craziness and um, so, that's very exciting, and so, we're going to do a book I think on our performance stuff, when we finished doing a focus book on social constructionism and when we finish a few other projects that we are involved with separately and together. [33]

So, (1) um here we are, um we've had some fabulous times now um traveling all over the place and um, finding out new ways of living together and meeting some challenges that we've had. I had some health challenges that now seem in the past, even though it raises people's (1) hair on their arms to hear about some it, but we're energetic and healthy and enjoying life; we are not um, retiring in a sense, we are shifting gears a bit, and um (1) we are very involved in something called the Taos Institute that we've been running for the last 10 years; Ken's the Chair and I'm the Treasurer, we try to promote social constructionist ideas in various ways. We have a workshop in social constructionism that we do in our house for 12 people, kinda like their our friends for the weekend and we talk social constructionism and um we go abroad to various places, we're involved in a PhD program out of Tilburg University in the Netherlands. Um, there's one part of us that wants to sort of simplify and slow down and another part of us that has these eyes that we can hardly resist the next thing that's going on. So, I think I will stop there um (1) and then you can come back and ask me questions if you like. I'm sorry that this has gotten rather long, and I hope, it is now 9:07 and I'll say Good Night, and wish you good fortune in making sense out of this. Bye. [34]

Dear Mary,

You mention *The Last Picture Show*, *American Graffiti* and *Forever Amber* in your story. Can you tell me about any other movies that may represent your past/past environments or that, perhaps, had an impact on you, your life or your sense of life's journey? [35]

You talk about the period in Boston when you and Ken met. Then he took a job and moved to Swarthmore and you continued on at Harvard for another year. Can you tell me more about that period, how you eventually got together and went to Europe? [36]

You mention 1968 at a time of great social upheaval. Can you tell me more about how that may have been reflected in your own life? [37]

You end by saying, "we've had some fabulous times now um traveling all over the place and um, finding out new ways of living together and meeting some challenges that we've had." Can you tell me more story about living together and meeting some challenges? [38]

Thanks,
Kip

[E-mail response from Mary GERGEN]

Back to your questions: Movies ... they were my life. I think I may have mentioned that. Ken and I agree that one of the links between us is our ways of living out movies in our life ... creating sets, striking sets, acting into a scene ... our theoretical ideas about emotional scenarios ... seeing ourselves as our favorite actors.. funny stuff like that. Special movies, hard to say since I saw two a week for most of my life ... and now with cable at least that many, I suppose. I don't always recall their names. [39]

When I was a girl, I saved up my stars for my piano lesson successes to trade for movie tickets that could be redeemed at the local theatre. I used to save them for Roy ROGERS and Dale EVANS movies. She was the only female cowboy movie star, married to Roy in real life ... and I really identified with her. My favorite cowboy stars. (They also had singing). I even played the ukulele in 6th grade, and had outdoor, cowboy fantasies. In fact at Catholic Confirmation, you were supposed to receive a vocational plan (to be a nun, they hoped), and I could see myself out west, in charge of a ranch-orphanage ... (at that time, 12, no men in sight ... just me and my girlfriends running the place). But on Sundays, I watched the dramas and musicals (that I mentioned) ... and the glamour of Hollywood, dancing, singing, love stories ... no special one). I did tend to identify with the brow/black haired stars ... Elizabeth TAYLOR was the most beautiful. I confess to falling asleep a lot in the movies that were considered highbrow when I moved to Boston ... and discovered the world of high culture. Ken and I have always enjoyed BERTOLUCCI films ... but I don't care for FELLINI or BERGMAN or ANTONIONI all that much. [40]

I do think that my greatest personal asset is my optimistic, good feeling flow emotional nature, and I think I am quite protective of it. For example, I have never gone to therapy, nor have ever wished to do so, because I would not want my

"gift" to be taken away from me. If I share any bad thoughts or feelings, it is with a couple of close friends, including Ken, who will listen and be consoling, but not be too invasive. I always know that no matter how down I might be it will soon pass... and so it is only necessary to wait for morning ... (and it is usually the case that it is after midnight, with some alcohol to fuel it, that I might feel blue) ... To be specific and give an example of what gets me sad, my mother, father and sister all died of cancer, my mom at 60, my dad at 67, and my sister at 50. I was very close to all of them and it is very easy to cry when I think of their lost lives ... I can do it just now ... but I do not cherish and prompt my sad feeling, I just let them ride over me ... and let them go. (When my sister died, I felt more bitterness and helpless sadness than any other thing in my life, much more so than my own cancers, which I somehow felt in control of, or at least able to survive.) [41]

You asked about 1968 ... and Ken and me and Harvard, etc. ... and about the challenges of more recent times ... I don't know what to tell you ... because there are things that I might say to you that I wouldn't like to have broadcasted to the world ... Perhaps I could just say that I do not want to talk about this ... and you can fill in the blanks, but not on paper ... Its probably all related to the movies ... love, affairs, sex, betrayal ... and finally, because we grew up in the 50's ... happy endings. I would love sometime to tell you about our running away together... but not for publication ... The 60's were a time for "Make Love, Not War" ... strong radical feelings against the government, feelings of freedom, rebellion, breaking down of hierarchies, sexual freedom ... an ethos that seems a bit weird just now ... I realize that what seemed to be the ways of the world 40 years ago are out of step with today. Hard to look back and not be a bit aghast at what was so much more conventional then. I think you can appreciate that. [42]

[Follow-up e-mail from Mary GERGEN after reading first draft of paper]

Hi Kip. I think what you have done is create a work of art, with the humble beginnings of a story. Very lovely, colorful, fun ... playful, as you said. I saw myself there, felt you had interpreted the outcomes in interesting ways ... and what there was seemed justified. I showed it to Ken, who also found all of these things in it ... we did talk about the politics of it.. who I become in the world through this ... As, an aside, given my background in biography and my own research, I don't think you would have created such a piece for any men on your agenda ... the story would not be so relational, familial, love/sex/partnering ... embodied, social, "cheerleaderly." SO ... I am a bit afraid, especially since there doesn't seem to be much on the surface, anyway, that suggests my professional side ... and my "contributions" to the field ... I don't talk about it much, anyway, so its not your fault that there isn't much about this. Ken said, it didn't seem to show how I was the only one, almost, at that intersection of social constructionism and feminism ... in psychology ... esp. here in the U.S. ... a really small handful, and most of them not very upfront about it all. I have been a fairly outspoken pioneer in this regard. For example, recently I lobbied and encouraged the Div. 35 (APA, Women) ... to put "social construction of gender" into their statement of

purpose ... and I have promoted the cause by encouraging PWQ, the flagship journal, to change their editorial statement, to be more openly accepting of qualitative research, after years of being traditional and closed (as well as boring) ... and there are articles and chapters promoting these views ... I wish that showed a bit, somehow, .. maybe referencing my website might do ... [43]

As for some smallish suggestions ... Could you somehow indicate that this is a creative outcome of what we have done together, and it is selective, or just one possible story, something that emphasizes both the relational aspect and the spontaneity of it?? This is funny, perhaps, but I strongly dislike the photo of the elevators you have in it. They look so industrial and dark and nasty. I think it was Frank Lloyd WRIGHT who once said the most beautiful structures in Minneapolis were the grain elevators, and I don't think he was being mean ... Against a blue sky, white or light grey rounded structures, dominating the horizons ... pure and simple and refined ... maybe you can't find any good ones ... then a lake, with grass, bushes, trees, a dock and a raft would do ... or a memorial board, with a flag, and names of soldiers ... or a bandstand, and a local band, and people sitting around on the grass ... or a field of grain, behind a small town street, or the typical 1930-40's movie theatre. [44]

Funny there isn't more about me as mother ... but I don't think I said so much ... I hope my kids won't feel bad if they see it ... they were always there, and a big part of my life with Ken was to try to co-create a blended family.. and we actually did a pretty good job in terms of the warmth and affection that we all feel toward one another. Its your baby, too, Kip ... and I don't want to spoil the lovely artistic creation you have made. I would say, my life became the opportunity for you to work your magic of color and space and style ... Cheers!!, Mary [45]

Citation

Jones, Kip (2004). "Thoroughly Post-Modern Mary" [A Biographic Narrative Interview With Mary Gergen]. Appendix: Transcript of Tape Recorded Interview With Mary Gergen, Spring 2004 [45 paragraphs]. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 5(3), Art. 18, <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0114-fqs0403189>.