

*Closeted/Out on the Quadrangles:
A History of LGBTQ Life at the University of Chicago*

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

**INTERVIEW #37a
(RECORDED FOR UNDERGRADUATE COURSE PROJECT, 2003)
NEWTON, ESTHER (1940-) AM 1966 PhD 1968**

At U of C: Fall of 1962 – 1966

Interviewed: November 29, 2003 (1 session)

Interviewer: Naomi Sobel (AM 2005)

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Length: -----

Interview (November 29, 2003) with Esther Newton in downtown Chicago.

NS: ... So I just need to get this on tape that you know you're being recorded, that you can stop at any time, you've done this before so you know...

EN: Ok. My name is Esther Newton; I know I'm being recorded and it's fine.

NS: Thanks a lot. So we'll just start with some personal background. Where'd you grow up, what's your family like, what kind of background do you come from, what time were you at the U of C exactly, what programs?

EN: How much background...

NS: Oh you don't have to give lots of detail. Where'd you grow up?

EN: I was born in New York City, I grew up there, lived there 'til I was eleven. Then I moved to Palo Alto, California, then I went to undergraduate from 1958-1962 at the University of Michigan. And then in the fall of '62 I went to the University of Chicago and I lived in Chicago from the fall of '62 through I think '66. I didn't have my degree yet but I left. Finished my dissertation and went back to New York.

NS: What'd your folks do?

EN: My mother had kind of a checkered career but she wound up being a dog breeder and my father was a, also had a checkered career, but wound up being a psychologist.

NS: Ok. So you came here in '62...

EN: I want to add something to that.

NS: Yeah definitely.

EN: I want to add something to that, which is that my family history went back to Chicago. Because my mother had been a student at the University of Chicago in the 1930s. My mother and father met because he was a union organizer in Chicago, that's how they met. And when I got to Chicago I found other people with similar history like Bobby Paul. So it had, among many reasons of why I chose it, I don't know why you'd care about that but one of them was this family background, history that was connected.

NS: Oh that's really cool. So, I don't really know, how people... how did you all, did you come out on campus? Is that kind of how people talked about it? You know, did you identify as gay when you came to campus? Who did you talk about that kind of stuff with when you came?

EN: Nobody.

NS: Or not, when you came out when you were there.

EN: Well eventually I did but not when I first got there. I was still struggling with my identity. I was still dating guys. I dated a guy the whole first year I was there. And then the second year, I think it was, I'm a little hazy about exactly the year but I believe the third or fourth year I was there, I got engaged to someone else who was in the department – a guy. But I had had gay experience before in college. So I was struggling with that and I had no one to talk to. And then the third year I was there, I went out on what seemed like a date with another graduate student in anthropology—Cal Cottrell. And at the end of the date I was expecting him to move on me, or you know, and he didn't and we had really hit it off though. And it came out that he too thought he was gay and he was struggling and had no one to talk to, and we became best friends. He was seeing a somewhat older man who worked for the phone company and his lover was into the gay community of Chicago and that's how I got into the gay community of Chicago – through him.

NS: So your community was mostly off campus.

EN: Totally.

NS: So where did you go?

EN: There were bars, there were bars. There, I don't remember the name of the main bar we went to. There was a bar that was fairly close to the lake...

NS: In Hyde Park?

EN: No, no down here [Ed.: the near north side]. There was nothing in Hyde Park. It was sort of middle class and mixed men and women very much so, so if you looked from the outside you might not really see much. And that's mostly where we went. There were some other bars too, that I got into on my own, that were more lesbian, more working class, more mixed class. Eventually I moved off campus [Ed.: to the near north side] so that I could pursue my gay life in the open with less worry.

NS: Yeah. Were those exclusively gay or was it mixed?

EN: No they were exclusively gay. I would not have gone to a mixed bar; I was too afraid of someone finding me.

NS: So they were mostly down here, that's really interesting.

EN: They were all down here.

NS: Yeah. You know now everyone things, the north, the really far north side so it's interesting to know that they were right here in the Loop. So you had one male friend on campus. Did you have other gay people that you came to know on campus or just him?

EN: One. I believe it's accurate to say that the whole time I was here... There was Cal Cottrell— I can say that, he's dead. And then maybe my third year I got involved with another anthropologist: Harriet Whitehead. But our relationship was a total secret. I mean, nobody knew. So it was completely closeted existence.

NS: That's really interesting. So you had no sense of anybody – undergrads, or no political groups, nothing on campus?

EN: Zilch. Absolutely nothing.

- NS: That's interesting. Did you, was there a lot of political organizing going on outside of campus? Nothing political?
- EN: You know, not, no. As an anthropology graduate student in those years, it was very, very insular. I didn't even know anyone outside my field. Except the people I had roomed with the first – I lived in kind of a boarding house in Hyde Park and there were other people. That's how I met my first boyfriend and there was a younger guy that I was very friendly with. They weren't in anthropology. But after that everyone was... It was a very limited, closed world. That's not completely true because I moved out of that boarding house, the next place that I lived, the next apartment that I had, I became friendly with this heterosexual couple. But it was a very closed world, very professional and driven. So my only friends for the most part who weren't in anthropology were my gay friends.
- NS: Is that kind of how you identified? Like you said gay. Like people wouldn't say "queer" or "lesbian." Is that the kind of words that you used?
- EN: Queer – no. Queer was an insult that straight people used. Yeah basically it was the gay world. The men and women and the boys and girls. I've never been that comfortable with the word lesbian, really. I don't know, it sounds like... maybe a disease or...
- NS: Yeah, my ex says it sounds like something you need to get removed.
- EN: Right, it does kind of. I've never... I tend to say, you know, "I'm gay." Even though I understand completely the reasons why it's important, because gay in most people's minds means men, you know, but I personally am more comfortable with that.
- NS: Yeah. I totally lost my train of thought back there. So, you had this really kind of separated world - you had your work people and you had your gay world. Was the gay world really... so it's not like it was very, you had a lot of mixed gender interaction within that.
- EN: Yes.
- NS: Was the lesbian community, and the women in the gay community, was that a lot of butch/femme stuff going on at the time? Or was it... or were you already getting a lot of the androgynous...
- EN: No I was more... I had been in the butch/femme world when I first came out, which was 1959 and that was in working class bars, and, well, bars in New York, they were mixed class. But it was very, the culture that I came out in was very strongly butch/femme,

which I identified with but it also freaked me out. And I realized later that it freaked me out because being butch meant that people knew you were gay. I mean there are a lot of reasons but the biggest, the one that's most relevant here was that it was a class identifier, that most butches were working class, and I wanted this career, professional career. And if you were identifiable gay, or you know, you certainly didn't want to look working class. So I had to work out a style of being gay, I kind of ran from that. I was looking for middle class gays and Chicago provided that because Cal was dating this guy in the phone company and this bar that we hung out at all the time was definitely a middle class bar. So it provided a world where that wasn't... that was kind of... it wasn't frowned on in the way later on in lesbian feminism but it was just kind of downplayed... Because I wanted to find a way to be middle class and be gay.

NS: I want to come back to something you said before where you were talking about that you spent kind of a while, you were dating this guy and you were trying to question stuff and figure out what was going on. Where were you getting your information from? You know, were there books you were reading or were you figuring it out for yourself? Did you have novels or were you reading more medical literature?

EN: ... I think the books that I was reading were important, in anthropology were important but it wasn't direct. It was more like, and I wrote about this, that reading ethnography, the idea that well, there are different... things are culturally relative helped me. But there was very little that I could read that was directly... I read pulp novels, like Anne Bannon, that kind of thing. So that was probably, as far as reading... And I also, as I got more... as I started to really settle on the drag queen project, then I really started reading a lot about deviance, and what there was, social science literature on gay men mostly and that stuff. So that helped me figure out. But in the earlier years, like let's say the first, when I was working on my MA, it was just, I don't know... I mean, I guess that's why I think, that's one reason why teaching really appealed to me so much as a profession because I didn't want, this is trite but it's true, I didn't want other young people to go through what I had gone through.

NS: So the people you've talked about [are] Cal, and you said you were dating another anthropologist...

EN: Harriet.

NS: Harriet. It seemed like the people you were really close with were in long term relationships. Do you find that to be true, were most people kind of in partnered relationships or was there a lot of kind of more casual stuff, short term?

EN: The guys were into casual stuff. I don't know, we were young, I mean...people were kind of shopping around. It wasn't strictly partnered. But again all that was in the bar. I didn't have that many opportunities because there wasn't anywhere to meet people.

NS: Yeah.

EN: You know, within the University of Chicago.

NS: Yeah we're actually looking for information not just on the University but the city as a whole so feel free to talk about people you met outside for sure.

EN: Well I met people in the bars.

NS: Were people coming to those bars from all over or were they mostly...

EN: I think they were mostly pretty local. I only remember one of them really, that I became, I think she went on to become an academic? Somebody I met in the bar, I don't know why, it didn't work out. Someone my age, we were young. I forget where she was studying...She had an apartment, around here somewhere. Everybody, you know, to me, gay life was here. On the Near North Side.

NS: Here being... Yeah we're on Balbo and Michigan.

EN: Well I don't know exactly where we are.

NS: That was more for the tape.

EN: But it was the Near North Side. That's where, that's what I... What was out west more? There was some kind of lesbian bar that was kinda funky. Which I liked in a way but I still was very worried about the whole class issue. And I mean I definitely wouldn't have had, well I was going to say I wouldn't have had a working class girlfriend but that's not entirely true either because the first girlfriend that I had in Chicago was a woman, how did I meet that woman? I met that woman in the course of my fieldwork that I did for my Master's. And I was working on black single mothers. And she was a black single mother. Now that I think about it I was involved with two people. And one was someone who lived nearby that same boarding house where I first lived that was in Hyde Park. She was married, she was black, she was married to a white guy. And I remember they took me to hear Malcolm X speak.

NS: Wow.

EN: Which was an amazing experience. Then it came, she was married to this white guy, but then it came out that she was gay. And we became friendly... She was kind of on the butch side. And I was all confused then about butch/femme stuff. Anyway we wound up in bed, it was a big horrible flop because we just didn't know what to do with each other. But she introduced me to another young African American and she was married... And we had this thing that was more than, you know like this sort of. But that was involved with my fieldwork that I did for my Master's. So I also had to interview these [women]. And then all the sudden I realize, "yeah I have had sex with informants." but that's the only time.

NS: Was there a lot of interracial dating? More or less than you saw in the straight world? Or not, not really?

EN: Well it was more of people that I, this wasn't exactly interracial dating, it was interracial sneaking.

NS: Ok, was there interracial sneaking?

EN: I guess there was because you know I was involved in it. I mean, I say sneaking because they were married. The one was married to a white guy and the other one was either married to or had a stable thing with a black guy. And I remember you know in that particular case because that went on all one summer with her and I remember the guy [she was with], she was afraid of him finding out... And I think there was quite a bit of interracial dating in Hyde Park at one point or another. But I couldn't tell you much more about it than that. The other people, they introduced me to people and stuff, they were straight. And so...

NS: Did you hear about any black gay bars while you were talking on the South Side?

EN: I didn't because these women couldn't do that.

NS: Yeah they didn't go out.

EN: They couldn't. They had young children, they were married, and they couldn't do that. So, no I didn't know anything about that. But bars were, see later on I got into all these other bars when I started working on the drag queen thing.

NS: Do you remember any of the names of them?

EN: I really don't. And I changed the names in my book and I don't remember now what the real names were... And those bars were mainly white but there were some black performers. And they were mainly men, those drag bars. Not completely, but mainly. There was a whole bunch of them.

NS: Where were they? Were those also here on the Near North Side?

EN: Yeah mainly down here. Definitely not Hyde Park. Well, wait a minute there was some bar down there. I can't remember the name of it but I think it was down there and it was mixed, racially.

NS: So you were talking, sorry I'm skipping around, about you were really worried about people finding out, there was a big separation. Were there rumors or scandals about people who were kind of discovered on campus being gay or everyone kept it under wraps?

EN: If there were I didn't know it. There had been at the University of Michigan. I don't know if it was the first year I was there or the second year I was there, there was a big entrapment thing that happened and the police entrapped all these men in some bathrooms in academic halls, these people's names were published and one of them killed himself and it made a big impression. And then later on I was kicked out of my dorm.

NS: At Michigan.

EN: At Michigan. And part of that it was nice, it was an honors dorm you know that you got into with good grades and it had good food and was real close to campus and all that. And I was kicked out and part of the kick out was, you know, the dean said, "Well we heard rumors about..." I don't know how, it was so secret, and you know I mean there was a male gay life at Michigan but there wasn't lesbian. Or if there was I couldn't find it. So I don't know how those rumors...

NS: Yeah that's interesting. Do you feeling like, the separation you had at Chicago, do you think that would have been the same anywhere else or was Chicago different than other places in terms of how hard you had to police that?

EN: ... I didn't, I mean in a sense I went to Chicago thinking maybe it would be easier because I was told by Hortense Powdermaker who was this elder in anthropology, see I had family connections to anthropology, and several people said "oh David Schneider,

you want to go study with him and he has a lot of weirdo students,” so I kind of pictured myself as one of those.

NS: A lot of weirdo students? What did you take that to mean?

EN: Well you could be a little nonconforming... you know and I was right. Over the years he had many, Cal was also his student, over the years he had many, many gay students.

NS: Were there other professors that people kind of perceived to be safer? Or just him?

EN: No, no just him. Although Julian Pitt-Rivers, he was supportive of me [but] he didn't have a tenured appointment so he didn't have the power that David had.

NS: Some of the people in gender who have done their interviews have talked about, have heard stories about faculty throwing house parties or different gay students throwing house parties that people kind of knew were gay. You didn't hear anything about that?

EN: Hey! I left out somebody so important: Ben Apfelbaum. I haven't thought about these things in a while. I did know somebody else, and that was Ben Apfelbaum. And if you want to talk about parties that's what made me think about Ben. Ben was gay and he was, he didn't say to straight people that he was gay and he never said exactly to me but it was understood between us that he was gay and he was the greatest partier. And he was always giving these parties that people in the department wanted to go, because the music. Ben unfortunately never finished; he was drafted and had to, he went to Canada rather than serve in Vietnam. But he became someone who was really, really important as a gay ally. He was really closeted also even though he, anybody would have known he was gay. He was very, had all the mannerisms and so on and so forth. But you didn't have to discuss your personal life. There wasn't this sort of Foucauldian, you know, pressure to confess. It was all gossip.

NS: Did people kind of feel more like his parties were a safer space than other places on campus or not because there would be other straight people there?

EN: Well no because there was... No, because people thought it was... You're saying people but the only gay people I knew were him and Harriet.

NS: Him and Cal?

EN: And Cal.

- NS: I'm trying to think of what I'm leaving out. I have all these questions. While you were here, did you ever, did people hear about Mattachine Chicago? With that forming around that time, or was that not something people talked about. Like any local political groups?
- EN: No, there was some, there was some talk about it. And the Mattachine people. I heard about it in the course of my fieldwork. I also had somehow heard about DOB [Daughters of Bilitis] because I started getting DOB [materials] sent to the department, not my home, hoping that if I got caught, I could say, "Well..."
- NS: It's part of your fieldwork.
- EN: Exactly. And you know it was in a brown wrapper kind of thing. So I knew about that and I knew about Mattachine, was being talked about in bars and the agitation. My principle informant was very interested, drag queen, was very interested in Mattachine and would make jokes about it and talk...
- NS: So was there crossover between the activists and people who were at the bars or not really?
- EN: Well... I presume some of the activist people went to the bars. Now how did people hear about Mattachine? I don't know, maybe they did some actions in the bars? It was known though. Because he would make jokes about and he made jokes about things that people would know about. So yeah it was generally known.
- NS: What kind of jokes did he make? What kind of reputation did they have?
- EN: He would make fun of it but I think the people that I knew who were sort of drag queens, performers, and people who were middle class but kind of liked to party, I think they were kind of befuddled by this. They were very interested but didn't know what to make of it. None that was on campus though. That was totally separate. That's what was going on in the gay community up here.
- NS: Were you involved in other politics on campus?
- EN: No, not at all, no. Even though I was a red diaper baby. Not at all. I just wanted to survive and get through graduate school and there wasn't really anything happening that I was aware of. And I never, I got very involved in feminism later. But you know I left in '66, it just wasn't really happening. Totally apolitical experience.

NS: I feel like I'm learning so much; this is really exciting.

EN: Well good.

NS: So did Ben or Cal or Harriet talk about having roommate issues? What was the roommate situation, did you have roommates? Probably not but...

EN: Not the first year when I was in the boarding house but then I moved into an apartment. And I had a roommate, a woman named Jackie who married an anthropologist... Jackie was a very upper class black woman. Very upper class. But we never discussed that. I mean I remember, I was thinking about her today, and I remember her saying when I got engaged to this guy in the department, you know one of the reasons I got engaged to him was because he was leaving next week for his fieldwork and then he was gone...

NS: And you're safe.

EN: And I remember her saying to me, you know I said, "Should I accept this proposal?" and she said, "This is your last chance at a conventional marriage if you want it." Because of my age. You know people married young then. When I got out of college there was this thing called senior panic. And senior panic was, if you were a woman and a senior in college and you weren't engaged... And I was feeling like, I was struggling with the whole thing of what my sexual orientation, and the class issue that was all woven up in there too, and I thought, "no."

You know I wanted to be normal. And so when this guy asked me to marry him I said yes, thinking by that time I was already maybe 24. So that was the context and she said, "You know maybe this is your last chance." And I think another reason she said that was that once you become too educated nobody's going to want you. Like I was just getting my Master's. So he was the star of the department and he was going to be Mr. Big and I was going to be Mrs. Big. I mean, he would be the anthropologist and I would be the helper. Which is what she did. Because she dropped out of school after her Master's and got married...and he got his degree and went off and became an anthropologist. And I never said to her, "Maybe I shouldn't marry him because I'm really a dyke." I mean she was my roommate for a year and I never, I mean are you kidding me? It was like two separate universes. I didn't want them to touch.

NS: Were you afraid of being kicked out of the program?

EN: Absolutely.

I was told one year, we had a year end review, so my advisor was there and this one year, I think it was maybe my third year or something like that, he said, "People are saying, in your year end review, that you don't wear skirts." I mean my immediate reaction, I was devastated really. And the idea was that if you didn't conform to gender norms, you weren't serious about becoming an anthropologist. But the trap was, if you really conformed to gender norms and you were a woman you wouldn't become an anthropologist. You know it was like such a no-win situation and I really, really was devastated.

I remember going to Julian Pitt-Rivers who was on the committee also and I was in tears...and Julian said, "Well you could make an effort. You know there's no reason that a woman needs to become like a man in order to you know become an anthropologist." So he didn't support me. And I really was devastated; I considered leaving the program.

NS: Did you change your behavior at all or no?

EN: Gee, I don't remember. Not much, because I... Another thing that counted against me that same year, I was very palsy with a guy named Chuck Palson who was big into drugs, which I wasn't. But Chuck had a motorcycle and I loved that motorcycle and we used to go around. So that was another thing. You know you're riding around with this guy on a motor - you know, they couldn't decide I think whether I was racy or was I a dyke. And what came down to me was things like you're not conforming so you're probably not really committed to anthropology. And you just never knew if you were going to get kicked out or... it was very scary.

NS: Were you getting - did you get any kind of feedback from your interviews? Did you feel like you interacted with them differently because of gender presentation or the assumptions they were making about you?

EN: You mean the drag queens?

NS: The drag queens and when you were doing your MA work earlier.

EN: My MA work, I still could pass better. And I did for the most part. It didn't come up. People didn't ask me about my orientation. Then with the drag queens, by that time I knew where I was headed and I would just say I was gay. I thought I would get better pull like that and I did. By that time I said I was a member of the gay community as well as a graduate student and that's where I'm coming from, I want to learn about the community.

And that was true, it was all true. But I never said that I said that when I was discussing my work back at Chicago.

NS: Were there other people working on the gay community in terms of research? No?

EN: No. No the main model that I had for my work was a friend of mine... who was working on blues you know for the black community. [Ed.: Charley Keil] And that was the primary, that is what really gave me the idea... He was working a lot on content analysis of the blues and he wrote a very good book about it. The blues clubs and the blues world. And I discussed my work a lot with him but I never discussed, you know, that I was gay.

NS: I feel so awkward, like, looking at my notes.

EN: That's ok. Relax.

NS: Yeah this is new for me. I'm a Gender Studies major and Jewish Studies, so I'm good at looking at texts.

EN: Chicago was very Jewish then.

NS: Yeah?

EN: Yeah the big thing in the anthro - I remember this in the anthro department, this happens, it happens, I don't know if they still do it but it would happen right after, in October I think? And it was called the Great Hamentashen-Latke Debate.

NS: Still happening. It's happening like next week.

EN: So it's later.

NS: Yeah.

EN: And I went to, I mean, all of it was new to me. I have a very complicated relationship to Judaism; my father is Jewish and my mother is a WASP, or was a WASP. But I wasn't raised Jewish at all except for some of my father's relatives and I didn't really know what they were talking about. But that's another subject.

NS: Yeah. Did your family know? Were you out to your family at all? Ever?

EN: Well, yeah. I came out to my father...and my mother about the same time.

NS: How did it go?

EN: My father said, "Well," he said, "You're missing out on one half of the human race." Which I didn't really have an answer for; now I would but at that moment I didn't really have an answer.

NS: "So are you?"

EN: I could have said that. I didn't think of it. But he said, "It's your life." And that was sort of it, we didn't discuss it much. And my mother, I wrote her a letter and she was like, "Oh do you think I was born yesterday? I have you know realized this for a while." She said she was sorry, she wanted grandchildren but she said it wasn't [for me]. Now at that time it was assumed that if you were gay, you weren't going to have children. So that, she said that was her disappointment, that she, she felt like that wasn't a good reason for someone to have children, just so someone else could have grandchildren. And she also had always said to me, "...Who wants to get married?" She never, ever held that out to me as an accomplishment. That was, I was given that from society.

NS: Do you feel like people, like gay people you know in Chicago, were kind of looking to find one person to spend the rest of their life with? Like a marriage type of thing?

EN: Um.... yeah especially the women.

NS: Yeah. [*Unintelligible--something about cats.*]

EN: What?

NS: Oh I'm just making jokes.

EN: Oh the cats?

NS: Yeah.

EN: The cats are easier to get than the life partner.

NS: Yeah that's true. So women were really looking for that.

EN: Yeah... but you know like I said we were young, so it's not like we were in a huge rush.

NS: So they didn't have senior panic for gay people?

EN: Not really, no. No, no. No it was very different. You know, I think it must be very, very hard for younger people to visualize what; it was two separate worlds. It was the world of the straight people and the world of the gay people. And they were, of course they could be contiguous geographically, but we just moved among them, they didn't know. And we lived in a different world where people didn't get married, they didn't have children, they didn't see the world the same way. I mean it was quite a socialization process; you might want to call it a de-socialization process out of the straight world.

NS: What did that entail? What was that process like?

EN: Well our world was most fully realized in the bar, for women. I don't know, for men they had some other venues.

NS: Like what?

EN: Cruising.

NS: Where?

EN: Bars, pick-up places, and there was, well I don't remember hearing about baths, but there were definitely parks that people talked about. The main place was bars...

NS: The socialization process.

EN: The socialization process. I mean that was the main hub of socialization, and it was like when you walked in that door, it was like you dropped through a trap door into this other world, it was very exciting and sexy. Where there was a whole perspective that we are the other. They're running the world, we're the other. We have this secret society and we have to protect each other, so that we can continue to do what we want to do, which is be together. Have sex with each other. Have lives with each other. And that's how it was. I couldn't find that on campus. I found it off campus. there was no, like, student group...

NS: I'm laughing because I'm the head of the student group at the University.

EN: Ah ha. I see. That's great! That's wonderful. And people can still go to bars, if they want.

NS: Did they card? Was it really hard to get into the bars if you were underage?

EN: By the time I'd gotten there I wasn't underage.

NS: Oh, that's true, that's true.

EN: But people did worry about it, and they did try. There were these sort of tough guys that would check you out [mumbling].

NS: Did the bars get busted often?

EN: They did get busted. But there was, I think a bar ... I think it was pretty ok payoffs for the cops.

NS: So were people you knew getting arrested regularly?

EN: No, no. But there was always that fear.

NS: You said you were there one time when it got busted?

EN: No. Oh my God I would have been... I could have lost everything that way. I mean that fact that people, like our friend Bill who was dating Cal, if he had gotten caught in a raid he would have lost his job at the phone company, I mean people were risking a lot. A lot. And that's, you know, I feel like there's nothing that our enemies could throw at me that, you know I've been through it, and I survived. It cost, it cost but you know I'm not, when I see what people went through, myself included, to come into ourselves and be able to live the way we wanted, it gives me confidence. Because you know you can take some pretty bad shit and still go after what you want. But had I actually been arrested, I knew I was risking it. I don't know. I knew people who killed themselves, I knew people who OD'd. I guess there were people who just couldn't take it; they got married.

NS: Was there a lot of drugs in the bar scene?

EN: There was more alcohol, that was the big problem. Alcohol could be bad. There was some, uppers, downers. The drag queens were into drugs, especially these pills. But people drank a lot.

NS: So do you think they drank a lot in the bars or a lot sort of at home too? Like was alcoholism a big problem?

EN: A big problem.

NS: More than in the straight community?

EN: I think that's hard to say, but it was a big problem. People did more drugs on campus.

NS: Oh yeah?

EN: That's where they did the drugs. This friend of mine, Chuck, with the motorcycle? He did every drug known to man. I remember one time, "oh let's go to this peyote party" and -

-----End of Tape Side A-----

EN: ...and I said, "Chuck this doesn't appeal to me." And he said, "Ah it's so... you see visions and blah blah blah." and I said, "Forget it. This is not for me." The one thing that I really, this is irrelevant to what you're trying to do, but the one drug I really loved was speed. And this guy Chuck he knew every... There was speed and there were these nasal inhalers, amphetamines, and these kids knew how to, you know, they would take the guts out of these inhalers and roll them up into little orange balls I remember. And so one night he and I got high on amphetamines from these nasal inhalers. And boy we solved the problems of, I don't know if you know anything about speed but you feel like a genius. And we were up all night, we weren't involved, we were just friends. Blah blah blah, we solved every theoretical problem in anthropology, yadda yadda and then the next morning, [makes a snoring sound], out.

NS: Were you out to him? No.

EN: No.

NS: No.

EN: So then that afternoon the phone rang and it woke me up, "Hi, it's Chuck." "Oh hi." "President Kennedy's been shot." I said, "What are you talking about? We're not high anymore; it's over." "No!"

...Because I didn't have a TV, so I turn on the radio, you know, and it was so traumatic I never did speed [again]. I guess I felt like I'm such a control freak I guess I felt like if I hadn't been high on speed he wouldn't have been shot. Anyway, Chuck did every drug known to man and he wasn't the only one. I mean there was a big drug scene on campus. I don't know about the undergrads, I didn't have anything to do with them. Except this

one kid who was in my boarding house. But the graduate students were really into drugs.

NS: Were there college students at bars really or not...

EN: The gay bars?

NS: Yeah. Did you notice them there?

EN: Yeah I think there were some.

NS: One of the things I was wondering was how much dating was there with an age gap. Was there, were there people like professors dating students or grad students dating undergrads or even like in the gay scene, more or less than the straight scene.

EN: There was no gay scene.

NS: There was no gay scene. I mean, I meant more outside of the university.

EN: Well the men always had more of the kind of age-gappy relationships than the women. Maybe there was a gay scene but if there was I never found out about it.

NS: I mean you're probably right; it probably wasn't there.

EN: I think that maybe Cal would have known or Ben would have known if there was a male gay scene. Because Cal eventually got really, he became, he was sort of dowdy when I met him. And he got into the gay scene and all the sudden he was working out, he had bulging muscles, he had tight pants, he you know turned into this hot number, and he was, it really interfered with his graduate school... I mean we come down here, and I mean there were massive opportunities for Cal. He would tell me, oh you know he was having sex with eight different guys in a day and this amazing stuff. Not on campus though.

NS: That's a whole area that I forgot to ask you about. You said that he had these tight pants and why kind of signs did you use to identify people? You know people joke about different, whether it's short hair or you know, a pink earring. What kind of codes did people use to identify each other and did straight people know about them or not?

EN: Well. See in the middle class circles I was running in, people tried not to look too obvious. I thought this woman, this African American woman the first one I got involved with, she was kind of butch looking and I knew that she was gay. And that was a big

identifier for lesbian. But you also could, there was a whole linguistic thing. It was called dropping the hairpin. And you would say, “oh you know I saw so and so at whatever the name of the club was.” If the person knew about the club they were gay. If they didn’t know, you just passed on, you know. So that way they wouldn’t know if they weren’t gay that that’s what you were referring to. That was one of the main ways. I mean there’s no such thing as a rainbow flag or...

NS: Oh yeah no. I didn’t mean really out there things, just kind of you know, whether, a hankie code or I’m kind of making things up but -

EN: I’m not so sure about the guys. I mean it was the same sort of thing, I think it was linguistic, it was little gestures. Well for example one way... well a lot of it had to do with being butch for lesbians. Like the way you smoked your cigarette.

NS: Explain that, what do you mean by that?

EN: Well... I don’t really...

NS: Yeah you can’t really...on a tape recorder but.

EN: So first of all if you were butch you had your cigarettes you know in your shirt pocket here and then you would pull out the pack, and you would like light them on your, you know in this masculine way, and then in the way you would hold it, you hold it like this. In fact I just saw one of my students; we went to a restaurant. I guess she’s butch, we never discussed this—that she is a lesbian. And she’s like, **inhales**. As opposed to **this.** You’re not going to get that on tape.

NS: No. I know what you mean.

EN: But how you’re holding it. I mean that was a big. And if the person sort of picked up and started looking at you then you might come out with the “well I saw so-and-so” or “have you ever been to such and such club” and if they’re straight, they don’t know what you’re talking about and you just change the subject.

NS: So that was the main hairpin that you used, the club. Were there actors that you talked about?

EN: That was more once you got into, a big topic between gay people was who else was gay. So you would talk about actors...and that was sort of insider cultural knowledge that you had. That was part of the socialization, knowing who’s gay. And not just actors but see

Harriet, who I was involved with, she was straight before. She wasn't involved in gay life at all before she met me. So I knew a lot more than she knew. If Cal got to, he knew a lot. He really immersed himself in gay male life.

NS: Was there a type of music that was more popular? You know with the guys, was there a big opera queen scene or you know Judy Garland?

ES: There was a kind of music when I came out in the late 50s early 60s that you know Dina Washington was very big in lesbian bars. But I don't particularly remember the music in the Chicago bars, because we were all coming out of there. I think it was Motown... And really until the last couple of years I was here, I didn't get into any lesbian scenes.

NS: When you got into them what were they like? How were they different than other scenes?

EN: Well the lesbian scene was more of a network than more public type institutions. You know it was more "so and so knows so and so, and she also knows so and so" but the people I knew there was very little separate lesbian scene. They all hung out a lot with gay men...

So while I was here, I wasn't involved much with a separate - you know earlier I was involved with those married women? They weren't in any lesbian scene. So I think the people that were involved in the different lesbian scenes were more working class.

NS: Did you hear about them?

EN: Well I went to bars, you know, and I saw. I went to bars sometimes... Then the last year I was here I lived on the Near North Side. I moved away from campus so, like I said, I could be in gay life more and I began to realize there was more happening down here than what I had realized. And there was this woman who lived, very attractive, and she lived in the same neighborhood.

...There was a middle class lesbian scene here but I had just gotten in at the fringes of it. Because I spent a lot of time on campus and I was involved in my fieldwork and so, if I had stayed here... but I went back to New York.

NS: Yeah. I mean you said you went to both middle class bars and some working class bars later. Were there a lot of people who were doing both scenes or were they separate?

EN: Well it was pretty much slumming, you know. "Let's go over to such and so's, kind of rough but you know." You would make a night of it. You know you would hit several different bars with a group of friends.

You know I never did that on my own but this woman, Pat, was kind of knowledgeable and she would go to bars [but] there was no guide for it. You had to know.

NS: Did people from the more working class bars ever come up here to the more middle class bars?

EN: I don't think they felt welcome. This bar where we all hung out was very middle class and I don't think they would have felt welcome. And it was white.

NS: Did people ever bring people of color or that just didn't happen?

EN: I don't remember that. I don't mean that didn't happen...

NS: Were the working class bars more mixed race or no?

EN: I don't think so but I don't really remember.

NS: Well is there other stuff that you want to add to that? This is really great. Doing all sorts of stuff. Plenty of tape left.

EN: Do you want to turn it off while you think about-

NS: That sounds good.

-----Turns tape off-----

NS: It's on again. Is that ok?

EN: That is ok.

NS: You said at one point Cal was [out] all day. Were there any cruising spots in Hyde Park that you knew about?

EN: I think he came down here. He was worried about being caught also. He was. He was very worried. Very tormented. And he had a drinking problem.

NS: Did people who were in longer term relationships often live with their partners? People you knew from bars and also people from the university. Or was that kind of seen as a risk?

EN: I think it was. I didn't know anyone - and again I didn't know that many people - but I can't think of anyone that I knew couples living together. Which would have been great for me because I had no concept of how - how would you make a life as a gay person. As opposed to - by that time I knew how do you meet someone and get into bed with them, I knew that. But how do you actually construct a life? And I mean anthropology was completely heterosexual, the model, and you were a man, and you got married to this woman and she helped you and you went to the field together. And so as a woman, much less as a lesbian, how, what was my life going to be like? And I didn't have any model for that while I was here. Though I did know in New York, a very dear friend of mine, she was ten years older than me and she had a partner and they lived together. And that was tremendously important. I went to their house one time and just soaked up every detail. It was like "woooow."

NS: Was she the only older gay person that you knew? Did you have... "Mentor" is kind of a funny way to put it.

EN: She was kind of my mentor. And actually the reason I went back to New York was that she broke up with her girlfriend and we became involved. I had known her since I was like, two. And she wasn't involved in gay life. She was totally ambivalent about being gay. And she also had a drinking problem. She also drank herself to death. So I didn't really learn anything about gay life from her because she wasn't at all part of that. But she knew how to have an affair.

NS: The idea of making a life with someone, is that something you talked about with Cal and Ben and - oh no I'm totally forgetting her name...

EN: Harriet.

NS: Harriet.

EN: Ben never had any boyfriend, that I could see. Ben and I never really discussed that we were both gay, it was just kind of understood. Cal was interested in getting laid as much as possible. He also wanted to try and maintain his relationship. I think maybe it was after that relationship broke up that he became so... hot you know. I don't think Cal knew how to work out, we were lost, you know. We were really lost. And it was only after I went back to New York that I began to- see my big model was all through books and by that

time I'd read about Gertrude Stein. That was big. Their life. The life she had with Alice Toklas. That's what I aspired to.

NS: Where there other historical figure, people you read you know, whether you read their literature or whether or not, you know, an Oscar Wilde type of model...

EN: No. Well I had done some reading but Gertrude Stein was the one. I was totally obsessed with her, totally obsessed with her life in Paris. That was, that showed me that it was possible to have a life as an intellectual, which is about what going to the University of Chicago was about – becoming an intellectual. That it was possible to have a life as an intellectual that was secure, loving... I don't know about the economics because I understood that she had money and I didn't have money. My parents were very comfortable. But I didn't have an independent income. I had to work. So I just read everything I could read about them because that was it. That's what I aspired to. And of course that had all kinds of role implications too, because I identified with Gertrude not with Alice, so that then I wanted to find an Alice – I've written about this – and you know, Harriet didn't really see herself as an Alice.

NS: How did she see herself?

EN: She wanted to go on, be you know, a professional anthropologist, which she did. She didn't see herself becoming my wife. Of course, you know, I wouldn't call it "wife" although Gertrude did. But, so that was a whole struggle for me. Anyway, in graduate school it wasn't real people that I knew, who were my models for the most part. It was Gertrude Stein. And I didn't know anything about Margaret Mead or Ruth Benedict or their life, or if there was a life behind it. Or the guys that were gay in anthropology. I didn't know they were gay.

NS: Were there other people outside of anthropology that were commonly known to be gay? In terms of people that we've discussed, like Gertrude Stein, that weren't, say, your role models but that other people looked to?

EN: Movie stars. I think prim – I mean the more cultured people probably did look to Oscar Wilde or, well Cole Porter was so closeted, couldn't be a role model for anyone actually.

NS: I think that pretty much covers everything. This has been really great.

EN: I forgot to mention one thing, which I [told] George [Chauncey], and that was that prior to my being there, there was a guy named David Sonenschein who actually did some work on some gay topics. And there was this thing that he had been kicked out – it was, it

was something scary, it was never exactly said. Gayle Rubin has been doing some research on this. She would know this better than I, though she's not a Chicago [alum]. But she's researched anthropology a lot. And that was kind of lurking there, that this guy, Sonenschein, had to leave the department, he was a grad student, he had to leave under a cloud. Maybe he'd been involved with teenage boys or maybe he had written about something. You know I never understood exactly what it was but it was always kind of lurking there.

NS: That was in your department, so that must have been really scary.

EN: Yes, yes, yes. That was in the department.

NS: And how long before you was that? Like ten, five years?

EN: I wasn't really even clear! About maybe five years? As I said there might be other people who would know more about this. And his paper I'm sure is around here that he wrote. But that was one of those things that served as a warning, that "watch your step, buddy." He definitely left under a cloud and it had to do with gay stuff.

NS: So the pressure you were getting seemed like it was more explicitly directed toward gender presentation, like "wear skirts." Do you, were there implications that there were, were they implying something about your sexuality or was it –

EN: Well I had a guilty secret so, you know, I was afraid that it meant that. In retrospect and in talking to David once I came out to David, which was many years later, I think it was more that I was maybe, that they perceived me maybe as being kind of racy, with the motorcycle thing. But at the time I was afraid, like I had this guilty secret, and I was afraid they... I was very sensitive on that whole gender issue. How many thousands of times have I been told that "you don't smile enough, why don't you wear more makeup." This was a scary issue for me. The fact that I went ahead to do a gay thesis anyway is pretty amazing. And I probably would have done a lesbian thesis if I hadn't been so afraid. But that was too close. And this way, it was men. And I could take on that aspect of the neutral observer and they couldn't really ask me, "Why? Why do you want to do this?" But I couldn't have done a lesbian one.

NS: I'm just curious, how were you presenting yourself then? Like having short hair was that too, too –

EN: I didn't have it as short as now. It was longer than this.

I definitely had a more, I wouldn't say a femme presentation, but I definitely at times would wear make-up, I wore heels at times, dresses. There were times when you just had to. And I was trying walk a very fine line and that gender presentation thing was a big, big part of it.

NS: Did you dress really differently when you went out to the bars?

EN: You bet.

NS: Like what?

EN: Oh you know, more like what I'm wearing now. You know, pants and I wasn't trying to come off butch, you knew explicitly butch, but I still was trying to come off butch. And androgynous but on the butch side. Yeah I never would have worn a skirt; I would have felt really weird. Whereas I wore a skirt here pretty often around campus, and my first job I wore a suit with a skirt, tailored.

NS: Did people in the bars [dress similarly]?

EN: No the bar that I, the bar I went to by that time already there was a pressure for a more androgynous look. It was the working class bars where you had to really, you know, much more dichotomous gender expectation. People mostly were sort of androgynous – the women.

[Interview wraps up with discussion of potential alumnae for research.]

NS: Thank you so much!

End of interview.