

Psychology's Feminist Voices Oral History Project

Interview with Phyllis Chesler

*Interviewed by Leeat Granek
New York, NY
September 6th, 2006*

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P: Phyllis Chesler, Interview participant

L: Leeat Granek, Interviewer

L: I'll start with some general questions first about feminist identity, then I'll ask you some questions about your career and the last part of the interview is a combination of both. If there is anything you want to expand on that are not specific to the questions that I've asked, please feel free to speak about what you want to speak about. The first question is very general, how and when did you first develop a feminist identity?

P: This is a very good question. Looking back, I was certainly always a rebel, from very early on in childhood I rebelled in many different kinds of ways. For example, I come from an Orthodox Jewish family and I rebelled by becoming a member of Hashomer Hazyer, which was viewed as a communist, Godless, Zionist organization from hell. I think when I was not bar mitzvah'd, I took it very personally and very hard and I think, I was not consciously a feminist yet. When I fled Western civilization and married a man from Afghanistan, I was there on what I thought was going to be a great adventure and it turned out to be captivity. I think I learned my feminism there. That was before the civil rights movement in the United States and when I came back and tried to explain to people what it meant to have servants treated as if they were slaves and they were slaves, and wage slaves at that. And to have women treated as if they were animals... no one could quite get what I was getting. The very student population that got Rosa Parks, the Jim Crow, civil rights activists didn't get it yet about women.

So I would say I formally became a feminist probably toward the end of 1966 when I heard that there was a meeting of women, the National Organization of Women. I was working in a brain research lab and doing some experiments which ultimately got published in *Science* magazine. I left that lab in my white lab coat looking for the meeting. I must have been possessed! Driven! I attended that meeting and made a whole pretty speech about revolution and evolution and justice and equality and so on. So I would say by the end of '66 and the beginning of 1967 I was one of the leaders of the second generation of feminism.

There were no foremothers. We did not know about Susan B. Anthony. We were not taught about feminist struggles in the past or about female genius or female talent or female suffering or their great grief. They were not seen as important enough and they weren't studied. I was nearing the end of a PhD in Psychology. I was about to start an

internship at both a hospital and at a psychoanalytic institute. The feminism was in the air I was breathing. It was certainly in graduate school where the teaching was sexist, it was conservative and sexist and neutral, not politically liberatory. And then all of the feminist CR groups so trumped therapy groups and the relief, the blinding, sweet relief of confirmation that one's self is not crazy, or ugly, or wrong, or irrational or overreacting. There were really political problems that we had in common, was very therapeutic. So as a psychotherapist, I learned enormous things from what collective actions and what collective consciousness raising could accomplish for the soul, for the mind.

I probably marched in nearly every demonstration. Went to every meeting and joined every organization and formed many organizations. We all did, it was very easy, it was not hard then. Then I got my PhD. At that point, a little before, it was 1969, in June, we had begun to meet about an organization for women in psychology. There were about 8 of us and we formed the *Association for Women in Psychology* which still continues to this day. Now what's hilarious is, well there are many things that are hilarious! One thing was that I made a demand for reparations on behalf of women at the APA annual meeting in 1970. Oh what a human cry! What a ruckus! First, I should have asked for 10 or 20 million dollars and I used the word reparation to signal identification with liberation struggles. I was quite young! The place went crazy and lots of jeering and mocking. But the women who were forming *Association for Women in Psychology* were quite nervous and were uncertain what I would do or what I would say and whether it was a good idea to say that much anyways. But ultimately they empowered me to do so.

L: Was that something that you had planned to do beforehand?

P: No, no, no, I was going to present a paper on the research I had been doing about whether patients wanted a male or female psychotherapist when they came to a number of clinics. It was a simple thing, I would just ask them. And even though women are seen as intuitive and compassionate in ways that men who entered the mental health area often are seen as very feminine, or like a woman, soft-spoken and good listener, everyone said they wanted a male therapist. I did a paper about this. If we think that G-d exists and G-d is a man, then we want male representatives of a male G-d head. Makes sense. So even many men in treatment will seek women because they have problems with other men, I wasn't thinking about that yet. So I did a paper about that which I did not present. The place went wild! Kenneth Clark, the incoming president accused me of being a racist and was yelling about black men being lynched because of white women! It was wild! Big, sort of projective test for the collective unconscious. A former president APA, a woman, Anne Anastasi, said to me, 'but Phyllis, women have indeed been treated so badly, that they are in terrible shape, you can't possibly think to work with women. I mean there are exceptional women, but most women are highly dysfunctional'. These were not her exact words. Although in retrospect, she had a point. The ways in which women work together or fail to work together are very important to look at.

I'm saying women are human beings so therefore we have strengths and weakness and they are socialized, or hard wired, but in the initial euphoria, women and male feminists only wanted to see women as triumphant, as better than men and big mothers. I mean it

was totally unrealistic. So at that meeting, when I asked for that million dollars in reparations, which I wanted to set up shelters for battered women and alternatives to mental asylums, I was very serious. I said I would never come back if I don't get this money. I never got the money and I never went back! Now, what it led to though was many other women wisely going back with a little bit more leverage, with a little bit more high profile and forming Division 35 and beginning to study women academically and have that work accepted. I did not go back because I did not go get the money to do these morally sane, humane projects on behalf of women.

Janette Rickey, on a TV program before she died, offered me her place in Athens, Georgia. I should have taken it. It would have been a residential facility. She had a big house and land in Georgia. She was an early suffragist who was still alive. I got to meet her. In retrospect, I should have accepted that land and found the right people to work on this project. So may she rest in peace. But there was so much excitement and so many things to do that I didn't say ok, my work will be to set up one program for a small group of women.

On the plane going home and I've written this several times, I started writing *Women and Madness*. I think I had begun thinking about it and may or may not... the reason I was now determined to do it is because they all laughed at me. The 2000 APA members, many men, some women said that I was crazy and I didn't know what I was talking about and nothing could be further from the truth and that mothers are the worst. The usual stereotypes. So I said ok, lets see who's going to laugh now! It wasn't done with bitter revenge. It was a holy passion. My speech made world headlines so many publishers came calling. It was a different era in publishing. So I chose one and I chose to go with my friend Kate Millet's publisher. Who published *Sexual Politics*. I wrote it in such intense fervor. Incredible speed! My university looked askance at it and made mocking remarks, it's not real psychology, it's only about women, it may not count. The discrimination against feminists in the university when we started out was quite profound. Now we are in a different moment, in what I call left wing McCarthyism, often in the hands of feminists and leftist's, is now censoring intellectual diversity. It's a strange turn of events. In the beginning, one was suspect when one challenged the dead, white male canon. I was the first woman hired in an all male psychology department. Within a year, I got them to hire 8 other women as openings emerged. You can imagine, they were not happy with me! I began teaching in September and then Christmas was coming around. And the all male department, very nice, chivalrous, family men, some perverts, but family man, said that they decided of course, jokingly, that we would be getting gifts fro the secretaries and for reasons that are quite obvious, namely gender reasons, that I would be the right person to chose the gifts. The chairman actually put that in writing and I framed it, I have it somewhere and I want to hang it up! So I didn't do it. I didn't do it in a snotty or angry way, I just said you don't know who I am! I don't like to shop, I'm not good at it, I think maybe one of you could do better than I could do! So it wasn't a combat. That's how it was back then. That's just how it was. It hadn't changed by December of 1969.

One thing about the *Association for Women in Psychology*, I was very glad they existed, but I didn't go back. In the beginning I had mixed feelings about everyone who did then 'toddy up' is how I thought about it, to APA, instead of getting plum resources on behalf of our issues, there was such a need to deliver papers and to publish and to be seen as serious in one's area. It's totally understandable. Here's another anecdote: I was speaking in 1971, before *Women and Madness* was published, to a group of psychiatrists. I was talking about state mental asylums and the use of female patients as slave laborers in terms of washing and cleaning and shopping and cooking. And again, telling the truth was ever shocking, a shocking thing! Then a woman motioned to me from the side, 'come over here' and when I finished, I went over there. She turned out to become a very prominent feminist leader and a dear friend of mine, and she said, she was whispering, 'my husband is a psychiatrist and everything you are saying is true!' and she looked around. And that's Barbara Seaman who I then went on to be one of the co-founders of her of the *National Women's Health Network*, which is also still in existence. We founded that in the mid '70's. The focus has been more on reproductive rights and they have their hands full with that. To my sorrow, I did not, and no one else came along who could focus them on mental health issues. I think they would have loved it, they would have been open to it, it's not too late, but I didn't do it. I kept moving from book to book, paper to paper, campaign to campaign, teaching and doing therapy. So the importance of that little anecdote is that here is this major feminist, good hearted woman, who has taken on the drug companies on behalf of women and she was afraid in 1971 to say too loudly, 'what you are saying is the truth! We have had women clean our underwear, wash our underwear!'

I'm thinking now of one of the other co-founders of the *National Women's Health Network*, Mary Howell, who is no longer alive. She became the first dean of students who is a woman at Harvard. The amount of disdain and persecution that she faced and that makes me think actually that Harvard that was very very late in allowing a woman's studies program to come into being. And that often the junior colleges and the stage colleges were quicker. The ivy leagues were far slower.

L: There is that story with Naomi Weisstein in the library. They weren't letting women into the library until very late. She came in through the window of the library and pranced around.

P: I know Naomi well, how do you know this?

L: I read it on one of the websites.

P: I don't know if it's true though! I'm going to look it up. Naomi was a wonderful comedian and played with the Chicago and the New Haven Liberation rock band. Because I used to be a singer, I was Neil Sedaka's girl singer in Brooklyn and then went on to study singing and study opera eventually, but put it behind me and I love it and I miss it and I sing when I can. My unwritten price so to speak for doing benefits in Chicago and New Haven was to jam with the rock band and it was wonderful! The women were so tough, mean and sassy and thrilling. This is 1969-1970 and all the energy

we associate with Woodstock, other than folk music, it's all male, hard rock, driving, sexual energy and here were these women and we were drumming. Often, I remember one instance in Chicago when the women were jamming bare breasted! It was unusual, it was an unusual sight and experience. So Naomi - here's an anecdote - Naomi and I met for the first time at a meeting for the *Association for Women in Psychology* and we're talking feminism. We don't stop talking feminism, it's the middle of the night and I think we may have been sharing a hotel room or were next door to each other. At a certain moment when we are about to say goodbye, she said, "Are you Chesler of..." and then she cited my first article in *Science* magazine and I said, "I am she!" And I said, "Are you by any chance Weisstein of...", and that was another, in her case, she did mathematical constructs of brain functioning, so we started laughing. She was far more sophisticated than me in certain areas, but we felt responsible for freeing women, unburdening women, that we didn't think we had the right to talk about any other subject.

L: How did you move from doing your dissertation in brain/neurophysiology to...

P: No, no, do you know what the dissertation was? It was on observational learning in cats and kittens and I had mother cats who learned a task which was to press a lever to a light and I wanted to see whether their kittens got it more quickly than various control groups. Of course they did. That's sort of the unconscious at work I think. I had been reading literature, I had been reading Freud since I was 13 and I did not need to learn in PhD school about the psychoanalytic approach to consciousness or reality or history. What suddenly caught my fancy was physiological psychology. That's why I had a late in life romance with since, I got a fellowship to medical school and spent a year there and decided I don't need to do this, I'll finish my PhD. I did these two articles in *Science*, the electrophysiological correlates, learning by observation, blah blah, and then the second one on the maternal influence on learning by observation. Role models, female goddess figures, heroines and so on. And then I was done with that. I actually had some interesting plans to do observational work with primates, but because of sexism could not pursue it further. When I had a meeting with the man who would be in charge of funding me to go to Africa à la Jane Goodall, he sort of flung himself on me and I broke two of his ribs! I had other things to do, it was something that was of interest, but the cause of women was calling me.

I'm trying to think of how to convey to you how things were. When I began teaching, the women had to be careful how they looked, how they dressed. We weren't immediately allowed to come in wearing jeans and look like our students. There had to be a maintenance of distance, which rapidly broke down at my branch of the university. Something important that has always bothered me and puzzled me. The more influential my work became very quickly, the better the reviews, the more lectures I was asked to give by both professional associations and by university groups in general, the harder my path became to gain tenure and to gain promotions and to gain pay raises. So much so that the lawyer that was handling our class action lawsuit in this "Women against the City University of New York," wanted to have a separate class action for just me! Because in her opinion the discrimination was political and was because I was already a highly identified feminist. We did win this lawsuit but it took 17 years and the win was pyrrhic

- it was a significant process to engage in, it was a righteous fight of legal resistance, but I don't think it changed that much. Other than something that I've already mentioned which is disconcerting that the very feminists with all the right politics later on, by the end of the 20th century, certainly the beginning of the 21st century became so politically correct in an entrenched kind of way that they went along with Stalinist views of Israel. And Marxist, Stalinist views of America in a way that is obsessive and unbalanced.

I think that many of the cultural feminists - and that term is not mine - that means feminists who opposed pornography and all the violence against women issues, including prostitution, did not win the day in the academy. The academic feminists who ultimately persevered were those that viewed sex work as a choice, just as abortion is a choice. Viewed custody of children as 'why not going to the father', why should mothers on some biological ground claim priority?'. So the positions that feminists adopted, in women's studies and in the academy in general were more appeasing of patriarchal priorities. So the feminists who I viewed as truly radical and truly activist were disappearing. Our work stopped being taught by the mid 1980's. I also founded the first women's studies programs in the country and I didn't think it was that good an idea. I knew that we needed something but I had something much more ambitious in mind. I thought we should have gender and women's programs in all the divisions, in all the areas, because I thought otherwise they are going to ghettoize us and marginalize us and then underfund us and then we will just be talking to ourselves, which is what happened!

Therefore Women's Studies became infected as if with the AIDS virus by this whole postmodernism, culturally relativist, Lacanian way of thinking, so there is no objective reality and therefore, if a woman is beheaded because she's in a Muslim land accused of having committed adultery or wanting to go to college, well everything is subjective, we can't judge that! We have been colonial, oppressors and who are we to say? We've been racist and therefore we can't stop formally colonized men from terrorizing formally colonized women. So the lack of objectivity and the moral relativism is something that I've now addressed in my last two books. I'm not saying you or I at this moment can say ok, we are going to rescue all the women in Afghanistan. We are going to rescue them from the Taliban and from everyone. But rather than just railing against the Taliban, it is crucial that we have a connection that we understand that we are connected and that we have a moral obligation to do something. As opposed to saying, ok, let's beat ourselves because we are imperialist and we are the true terrorists and we're Hezbollah. We are Hezbollah now.

End of Tape 1 Side A

Beginning of Tape 1 Side B

L: How do you think Psychology can become more politicized?

P: I think psychology should become less politicized. There are several listserv groups that I'm a member of and they are psychology, feminist listserv groups. The minute the

question that Israel or Israel/Palestine or the Middle East or the war comes up, all sanity flies out the window. Heavily propagandized Westerners, often Jews, say Israel is to blame, everything Israel does is wrong, if Israel was totally different or didn't exist, then Palestinian women would be really ok, or a lot better. This is not true! What I get in return to my responses first of all, is propaganda, lies, but with such passion and verve and power that it is heart stopping. Then the second thing that happens, is one Muslim or one Arab woman will say, 'oh my entire village and the loss and the pain and the dying and the Israeli Nazi's are killing them'. The minute that starts, all of the Western, quite safe in America, feminists, they say, 'oh you poor thing, you are so right, we are going to help you in anyway possible'. Most recently there was a listserv group and I began to say "Let's bring in some facts, let's try to bring some light and less heat." I started bringing in facts and the group went crazy. because these are the kinds of psychologists who are launching, who are using psychology as a profession to try and boycott Israeli academics, condemn Israel unilaterally for disproportionate military actions when they are not condemning Sudan and the genocide.

L: Ok so what do you think that's saying about the discipline?

P: That it's become politicized. But politicized in a way that smacks of totalitarian thinking. It's not as if each person reads 20-25 papers everyday as I do and weighs and balances and studies the history of the conflict. These are mainly psychologists who teach psychology of women classes or who see female patients. What they know about the Middle East, they learn from left wing propaganda but they believe it with their whole hearts. It's the most important thing to them, so the minute you say Israel or you say anti-Semitism they think Islamphobia. And instead of understanding that we should really be looking at the psychological consequences of Islamic gender apartheid on Muslim women or an Arab Christian women and it's coming our way very soon, it's here already... instead of doing that and that would be important to do, or looking at the psychology of terrorists, women and men, but mainly men, what they are doing is using their profession to be a platform for totalitarian lock step politically correct non-thinking. So I would not want to see psychology become more politicized. We respect expertise expect when it comes to the Jews and Israel. Then anyone can say anything and everything and they do. With a fundamentalist passion and I'm including the secularists here.

I want to backtrack. After the Copenhagen United Nations meeting, I found it necessary to put a panel together to present the facts about Jew hatred to American feminists so that they had the chance to think about it as racism and whether or not they wanted it included in the lexicon of the racism's that we opposed. So it's Connecticut, 1981, there is an all star panel that I convened. A lot of the Christian women were quite offended because some said that Jewish women were pushy and already had everything. Then some African American women said, there's the Jews trying to steal our thunder. We finally get a foot in the door and they are talking about racism against them and they have white skin privilege. From there, 1981, in Connecticut, let me take you to one other vignette. *Association for Women in Psychology*, probably a year or two or three after that when for the first time a Jewish feminist caucus was convened as part of AWP. I heard the gossip

against it and about it, 'Who do they think they are? They already have everything'!. That led ultimately to a conference in Seattle that Kayla Weiner organized and that she then put into an anthology called *Expanding Boundaries* and I did the introduction to it. So there was already within AWP and within feminist psychology circles, the left position which has historically been a Jew-hating position. And the psychology of 'why would a Jew be part of that?' Well to survive, to fit in, to please, to appease, to be done with the burden of being Jewish, etc. The funding sources for progressive work is all of a piece, I didn't see it that way then, you are supposed to love a country that doesn't exist, more than any other country on earth, Palestine. And you are supposed to hate a little country that is fighting against great odds to survive, Israel, with all your might. This is the give-in! And if those are your politics, if that's your psychological starting point, then you'll be ok. You'll fit in, you'll get grants etc.

L: One thing I did want to ask you about is one of the first things you mentioned, is that you come from a traditional, Jewish, Orthodox home. How if at all, you talked a little bit about this, affect your feminist identity?

P: I was outraged that I wasn't bat mitzvah'd. I think that my passion for justice has everything to do with my being a Jew. The fact that I was privileged to look for justice for women could be argued that that's Jewish. But one could also argue that no, this was just this moment in history and that one was privileged to be there. Now that I understand a little bit more about Judaism and have studied Torah for about 20 years and admired those who have such a store of ethical and mystical knowledge that I will never be able to match in this lifetime. I have a very different feeling about tradition. The very tradition that I wished to overthrow, that I had been part of indeed, transforming, if not overthrowing, is now a tradition, interestingly enough, that I see as an under siege by the force of Islamism and Jihad. I cherish the tradition, however imperfect it is, and however, because even though women's position in Judaism is not equal to men's, it may be different, it may be sacred, it may be interesting, the women may not feel discriminated against, It is still different and it is still not equal. Compared to women in Islam, it's better. So now I've learned to make exceedingly fine distinctions and it's very important to do that. I also see that there is a difference; it's not republicans versus democrats, or leftist versus rightist. People who partake in the sacred, who organize their lives around certain rituals and God centered community, who could be very firebrand feminists are one group. Then there are the secularists, another group. And so much of modern feminism has been grounded in secularism in a very fundamentalist kind of way. So things turn out later in the day to be a little bit more complicated and women have spiritual needs and community needs and family needs and needs for tradition, which feminist revolution cannot satisfy. Certainly, just because you are working as a member of an oppressed majority doesn't mean that you really love your sister the way you love yourself. If you don't love yourself that much because your self-esteem is low, how well can you love the next woman? And if you are only allowed to compete against other women and not against men, you are going to compete with full force. If you can't get your way, you also have full societal permission to slanderize her and ostracize her. So even though women long for intimacy and will do anything to retain the bond with each other and it does go back to the mother/daughter bonds.

So that's why we smile and we're nice and we don't say what we really think and we don't develop very strong thoughts, we keep it quiet because it might offend our best friend. Then we'll lose her and we don't want to do that! One day holy hell breaks loose and then you say, I've always wanted to tell you this and everything comes out that you never said. This is not very good, but it's what happens. Just because you belong to an oppressed group doesn't mean that every member of that group is going to be your best friend or your best colleague or your best comrade or your best lover and it doesn't mean you can't work with members of the oppressed group. So in the beginning, I didn't appreciate the roles that men could play in feminist transformation. And I came to see over time, that they could and when I did, it was seen as heretical. It was seen as betraying the cause of women and going over to the dark side. Wanting to include men. In fact, when I got married, legally married to an Israeli, it was my second marriage. I got yelled at a lot by feminists at the time. This was 1973. When I gave birth to a son who is now 28 and is wonderful and he is a feminist, I got yelled at again for giving birth to the wrong gender. I was supposed to have a daughter! It was 1978- one learns from these things and you get stronger.

And psychologically, women want so much to be the beloved, chosen object of a maternal gaze. So you have a feminist leader and you don't want her to become the mother to one other little infant whose not you. Right, you don't want her to have a male infant! That will invoke many painful unconscious memories of all of the all times your own mother, or the collective mothers preferred men to women. Very painful stuff! So many feminists alas, then voted against biological motherhood and had I think a fixity of obsession with abortion for very complicated reasons. I'm in favor of abortion, I'm not going to change my mind! But in retrospect, I think that the dialogue with our enemies and our opponents could have been handled in a more civilized way.

I've now met conservatives who oppose abortion but who oppose trafficking of women and children. And they believe in certain scared issues, but they believe in workplace fairness and equality. So they are not, in short, the demon or the devil that feminists all along made our opponents out to be. We happen to disagree profoundly on certain issues, that doesn't mean that our opponent is the devil. And it doesn't mean that we are devils either.

L: In 1965 you did work in the Head Start program at Yeshiva. Can you tell me a little bit about that? What were you doing? What was that like?

P: I am thinking of three separate people. Vera John-Steiner, a wonderful woman from Hungary originally, and Cynthia and Marty Deutsch. They had huge funding to study what would help impoverished, underprivileged children to fit in and succeed even in token ways. All I can remember vaguely is constructing questionnaires and preparing bibliographies. Doing some research but I cannot recall the details.

L: After *Women and Madness* came a prolific collection of books related to women's issues. In 1976, *Women, Money and Power*, in 1978, *About Men*, in 1979, *With Child*, in

1986, *Mothers on Trial*; In 2002, *Women's Inhumanity to Women* and '*Women of the Wall*, and most recently, *The Death of Feminism*.

P: 1978 was *About Men*, and it was a psychoanalytic meditation on male psychology and how the nature of scapegoating women has a great deal to do with father/son infanticide and fraternal rivalries that play out psychologically. And then I got into the mother research. I did three books, *With Child: A Diary of Motherhood* which my son Ariel introduced when he turned about 20 in a new edition. It's a wonderful introduction, very sweet. *Mothers on Trial*, a major issue there, so many feminists either misunderstood or neglected entirely, which is the importance of motherhood to women psychologically. What happens when you are afraid that you will lose custody or access to your child because you are a woman? You could be a perfectly good mother, or a good enough mother and still you're in this danger because you are a woman. There was a refusal to understand this and I then found some feminists to work with and we did a major speak out, one of which was in Canada. Many liberal gender neutral feminists at that time and to this day said, 'let the men have the kids, get rid of them, for G-ds sakes!' This was the anti-biological mothers who said this, as if somehow paternal custody meant that women would have corporate status or have economic enhancement if we give up the children. Completely incorrect. Among psychologists as well as among non psychologists who are feminists, there has been a deep ambivalence about biological maternity, about children/childcare issues/child support issues/ custody/divorce battle issues and then the sacred area, it sort of all goes together. I've certainly done my part in writing about this and speaking about this, but over time these views disappeared in the profession and in the academy. So think about what students clamor to hear when they can get a speaker from off campus. They want to hear about transgender warrior, butch/femme relationships, lesbian marriage- the terrorists who are the Christian fundamentalists against abortion. It's very important that the loss and erosion of real, original, feminist knowledge has taken place in the era of feminist women's studies and the feminist movement.

L: Out of all the publications, there are so many, we can't get into all of them, which one are you most proud of? And why. And the second question do you think has had the most impact?

P: I think, obviously *Women and Madness* has had the most impact. It has sold more than 3 million copies and been translated into many languages. I've just updated and revised it with a more expansive intro, but I had only two weeks in which to do it. The nature of publishing, I needed a year to do it right. I also think I could have written another book and let that stand for its time. So that I think so far, has had the most influence, or the most known or the most used, it's the most referred to. Asking an author or an intellectual to choose among books is like asking a mother to choose among children. You know not what you ask! But I would say that I think *Women's Inhumanity to Women* which to me about 20 years on and off to write and which many, many feminists, including psychologists wanted me very much not to publish. 'Not to work on, say it isn't so, Phyllis, don't tell the men this might be true'. Let's all go Carol Gilligan's route- women are morally superior, but ironically, Carol's own research showed clearly that the

silencing, the loss of voice in the little girl's is because she's afraid she'll offend some other little girl who will shun her and slander her and that will be unbearable. So Carol has paid attention to her own very important research. And so I think *Women's Inhumanity to Women*, is in a way a continuation of *Women and Madness* because I sounded the theme there but didn't develop it more fully. And I think that this can never change if women don't acknowledge it and that it is the single, the psychological reason for why the second wave of feminism got burned out or blew up or stopped being our fabulous, vevy, selves. And I'd like next generations to learn from this. It's not that women are vicious and terrible and malevolent, but as I say, we are as close to the apes as to the angels, just like men! And we have it within our power if we so choose to resist conditioning. To choose to do so and try to do so and to resist hard wiring if that exists as well, which I fear it might.

Beginning of Tape 2 Side A

L: What would you like to see happening in the field of Psychology in terms of the research that you do?

P: Well, I would like to see psychologists become schools trained in tolerance. That means being able to really hear and not disconnect from in savage ways, different voices, different opinions. I'm afraid of feminist conformism and identity politics and I'm afraid of a lack of courage that difference requires. When you first came in, I showed you a photograph of me and Margaret Mead. We were debating each other about feminism. She was opposing it and I was defending it. And about 20 minutes into my carefully prepared lecture, she comes up to the front, nearly knocks me aside, and took the mic and said, 'well, you young woman are clearly very brilliant, but how many other more like you are there in your movement of yours?' That was for a second a stumper, but I rose to the occasion. When she spoke, she blamed women for rape. She said clearly, rape exists because women have violated a taboo and they deserve it. Well, the entire feminist community of Cincinnati turned out for this and booed and hissed her and they planned a reception for the both of us and then dis-invited her. I didn't go! I stayed with her and what is that lesson? What is that message? I couldn't have disagreed with her more, but out of respect for her accomplishments and her pioneering status, I wasn't going to publicly humiliate her or break with her because I'm right and she's wrong. Then we bonded. And she did something quite amazing which I write about in *With Child*. At the time, I said I was thinking I'd get pregnant and she said, let me know when you do and I did and she came to visit me. Before she even got in the door, she said, 'what are you doing about your nipples?' So it is clear that the grandmother of the tribe had come to initiate a young mother to be. It was very moving and I sent her the manuscript of *About Men* and she said it was brilliant and would not endorse it unless I took out my 2-3 pages about rape. I said, 'Margaret I can't do it' and she said, she couldn't endorse it and she didn't.

So why this anecdote? While it was dead wrong in my opinion, she was worthy of my profound respect. I would like feminist psychologists to do that. So if they think that somebody is reactionary or conservative, or republican and anti-abortion. Well you know

what? You can still talk, you don't have to demonize them, you can listen to them and try to understand them without necessarily trying to convert them to your point of view. People arrive at different points of view, so I would very much like psychologists and feminist psychologists to really learn this.

I'd like the psychologists, many who are Jewish to really learn about Jew-hatred and its most tragic history and the impending second holocaust that is upon us, I fear it is. And it's going on in Israel already. And I would like to melt their hard hearts and the compassionate guise of the healer to include Jews. I would like that as we gaze on the face of the suffering around the world and send money or write poems or give speeches or do mental health work, please include the Jews. Don't exclude the Jews, don't demonize the Jews. Doing so will be the end of Western Civilization as we know it. What happens to the Jews happens to humanity.

Nobody is paying attention to the Sudan. I've written a number of pieces on what I call gender cleansing in Sudan with the repeated public gang rapes of the women and children. But you don't have a feminist delegation going there, forget about a military intervention which I'm serious about. The U.N did nothing and will do less. I would like the psychotherapists to understand more deeply about prejudice and I'd like the blind spots to be revealed and confronted and hunted down if you will.

L: What advice would you give to a feminist woman working in the field of psychology today?

P: I think things change very slowly. People often think that it's all been done and you think you have nothing else to do. It's all before you, it is all before you! And very often the wheel needs to be reinvented for each generation, just like each generation has the opportunity to fight evil and pursue justice. That doesn't mean you don't have to worry about that, on the contrary, I now understand that evil is here and the good people need to do battle with it in a variety of ways and each generation. So, I think that maybe the feminist influence in psychology has taken us 20% of the way towards equality. I think that on a good day. On bad days, when the same mental health professions who are biased against mothers because they are women and I read the mental health reports and see this. I critique them and then I think nothing has changed. And by the way, that's women mental health professionals the same as men. So, working in the court system which I've done, I see the same biases. Hearing from formal mental health patients about how they were treated with scorn and with derision and dangerously by those in care they found themselves. I think not exactly the 19th century but it's not really great in terms of how we deal with mental illness. It's a different landscape now, people aren't put in mental asylums, they are allowed to walk naked on the streets or they are medicated and as long as they are quiet we don't really care. So it's a different set of problems now that need to be addressed.

I also think that trauma is better understood now because of the feminist work of my generation. And one of the things I'm very proud of is that I reviewed Judy Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* for the NY Times. I wish the NY times would review my work!

They stopped reviewing my work and allow me to review other worthy such works. We understand a lot more about trauma and women against violence issues and if there was funding and a will, it would be great if the work could be done. It's still there, it didn't go away.

L: How do you balance your personal life with your professional life?

P: Why do you assume I do? In order to have the kind of intellectual perseverance that I've had, you don't balance. You give up practically everything. With my son, I thought I would have a father who would do half the work, but he left. His promise to stay was a joke. So I then became a single woman against really my will. But I didn't drop the baby. The Amazon warrior does not drop the baby. So I balanced the way that all women balance. By going without sleep, by losing health, by taking from my own flesh, by hiring others to help me and impoverishing myself, thereby. Because you have to do it. But you can't have it all. So in many ways, looking back, I couldn't have written one book less and in fact there are two books unpublished and I hope more to come if I can find publishers. You know then you are in a grip of a calling, or a grip of a vision, or at the service of a movement and the personal life and the building of personal relationships and social connections just fall by the wayside. You are at the mercy of the kindness of strangers. That's how it is, that's the deal.

L: Ok, I want to be respectful of your time. So is there anything that I haven't asked you about yourself, about your career, about psychology, about feminism that we've touched upon that you feel is very important for me to know or that you want to comment on?

P: Probably we could talk another 10 hours! So this is a snapshot. I think psychoanalytically, I always have. I think it's a good way of comprehending psychology. When I was in Vienna in 1982, I went to Freud's office and they allowed me to just hang out there by myself for a little while. And I said, oh, 'Dr. Freud, tell me about your troubles'. And he told me about being a Jew. And this is someone whose theories about women are deep, daring and dangerous but not always understood by feminists. So psychoanalytic approaches are important to me in my writing and thinking. And in how and when I help somebody or try to understand a situation, I find it very useful, even though psychoanalytic friends tell me business is difficult and drying up and not covered and so on. I'm not one of those feminists or psychologists who 'poo poo's psychoanalysis or says that medication will do, or that it never has been proven to help anyone. Lots of research has been done to show that it doesn't help anybody. But it's a way of thinking and it's a self education privilege or luxury.

I certainly miss the excitement and the feeling of very strong... we'd have to talk again about sisterhood and what does it mean and did we lose it or did we ever have it. But to the extent that we all thought we were having it, I miss it. But we also all had to deal with the trashing of one feminist of another and we also had that at the same time. Flo Kennedy who I knew, she had three funerals because her various feminist daughters couldn't agree how to bury her and memorialize her. I'm told that recently Betty Freidan had a memorial service which I was out of town for but wasn't invited to speak about

because I would have use the word Islam and talked about politically incorrect things. It turns out that it wasn't really a memorial to Betty, it was about Bella Abzug, abortion, peace in the Middle East, a film was shown about that, now this is not respectful. Kate Millet gave a very nice speech about Betty, but I think it was the only one of its kind. The whole day should have been like that. Everybody is greedy and hungry so there is an inability to restrain the self and the needs of self in order to honor a foremother.

On the one hand there is maybe an overly zealous romanticizing of certain icons like Jackie Onassis or Princess Diana or Gloria Steinem and it has no substance to it. It's not because there are real achievements that are appreciated and that have been done in a lifetime. It's sort of Virgin Mary worship in a way. So you have girlish attachments to fairy godmother figures and then you can't honor less than perfect, highly imperfect, difficult, real foremothers. I would like women to think about that.

L: That was great and a wonderful interview. Thank you so much.

P: Thank you so much.

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