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**WOMEN AT THE CENTER:
HISTORY OF WOMEN'S STUDIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE**

TAPE LOG

Dr. Suzanne J. Cherrin is an Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies and has a core faculty appointment in the Latin American and Iberian Studies Program. She has taught in Women's Studies at UD since 1986.

Name of person(s) interviewed: Suzanne Cherrin

Other people present: No one

Interviewer: Emily Bonistall

Date of interview: April 29, 2012

Location of interview: Home of Sue Cherrin in Wilmington, DE

Special conditions (noise, interruptions, etc.): Her cat jumps on both of our laps at various times throughout the interview.

General description of contents: An interview with Sue Cherrin about her background and her involvement in the University of Delaware's Women's Studies program and Department.

Recording Format and disc number: Video interview

Total Running Time: 55:36

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00:00 Introduction. Background questions about growing up and what was it like growing up as a girl. Moved to DE when she was 12. Grew up in NJ, CT, and MD. Move from rural CT to a working class MD town, it was a big change. Had to figure out to fit in. Move to DE was difficult because it took awhile to get into a group.

3:13 Discussion about different expectations for boys and girls and different levels of classes: academic track, commercial track or general track. Comments about teacher advice for girls versus boys. Told when you are working as secretaries you'll be able to meet the man of your dreams. "It was just like the show Mad Men." Told her parents and they said you are going to college. Both parents are college educated. Dad was a Ph.D. Chemist and Mom has a masters in psychology. (quick cut to get a glass of water)

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5:48 Discussion about college experience, gender differences in college, and choosing a major.

Went to University of Delaware for all of her degrees. Started living in a dorm and hated it. Discussion about boyfriend. Different restrictions on men and women in dorms discussed. Had a lot of freedom in high school so this was a big change. Discussion about early difficulties in college because boyfriend was elsewhere; had to line up in the hall to make a phone call with a pay phone and felt cut off from the people she cared about.

Moved back home to live and commuted which gave her more freedom. Started doing better in school. Married when she was a junior (1965) at age 20. Discussion about the meaning of marriage as a rite of passage. Discussion about gender roles in marriage. Even though equal in lots of ways, he wanted final say in things. Able to go to school together, study together, etc.

Discussion about work after graduation; hired by family court; worked as a probation officer for two years and then got pregnant. Major difference in those days; could only work until you were 6 months pregnant in a state agency. Started to teach Sociology classes at DelTech part time. Taught there for a long time, also started teaching at Salem Community College. Realized she needed master's degree so returned to UD for master's and then doctorate. Scared of statistics but had help with friend in graduate school who was a whiz at math.

14:45 Discussion about when started working at UD. Was teaching assistant and was told she could teach one of the classes as part of duties. It meant no tuition since she would be teaching.

15:31 Question about status of women's studies at this time. Not sure on dates, but it was a fledgling program at the time. Didn't have any faculty; used faculty from other departments. Sociology was a big draw since there were several women faculty and one of them was running the program (Margaret Andersen) who hired her to teach women's studies courses and sociology since she had specialized in sociology of gender.

16:42 Question about teaching cross listed classes. Not sure – I believe I went full into women's studies. Actually I'm pretty sure I did both intro to sociology and intro to women's studies.

17:08 Question about the creation of two halftime faculty positions in 1986 and what it was like to be one of them as well as what the program was like. Halftime meant 2 courses. Was still married and working on the dissertation. A few years later when getting divorced, she needed more than halftime because low pay and half benefits. This was an exciting time – classes were small, got to share a lot of information about gender and growing up female, had lots of events like informal consciousness raising groups and dinners with speakers. Still do these things but because of the size its different. We used to get together at each other's houses and have wine and snacks and just talk and challenge each other about things like intersectionality and race and domestic violence.

20:52 Discussion about dissertation work and dealing with family life. Excitement about research. Was very difficult juggling work and family. But both thesis and dissertation meant a lot to her. Master's thesis was on the division of labor in the home and feminist consciousness; discussion of

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her master's thesis. Dissertation was on the gender gap on nuclear disarmament; discussion of her dissertation.

29:20 Question about change to full time status? Must have been about 92?

30:00 Discussion about creation of major in 1993 and also move to full time positions and impact they had. Move to fulltime was big change. Major was wonderful; All of a sudden we had more dignity. Unfortunately because of sexism and hierarchies, women's studies often ridiculed from people outside who didn't know what they were talking about. The major validated program. Personal and also program impact of move to the full time position discussed. It helped us grow. Can thank two people for that transition: it was when a man got into the dean's office (Tom DiLorenzo). He validated us, not previous deans. Marian Palley who was our director at the time because she went to bat for us and she got us our full time positions. Others had not valued us enough to do that.

33:00 Were there other people who were supportive? There's a difference between people who say they are supportive of women's studies and people who did something about it. And Tom and Marian are the two who did something about it.

33:39 Question about the first team-taught class? Was not part of it; that was before me.

33:55 Question about the impact of transition from a program to department? The prestige of being a department was a wonderful feeling. I don't know the ins and outs of funding and how it worked but to all of us, it was great. Every time I say women's studies department, and now I'll say women's and gender studies department which is fantastic.... Should have done this awhile ago, in my opinion. Importance of Gender being part of identity of department. Will require a little bit of shift in overall thinking about conceptualizing sex/gender and not just women.

36:08 Question about women's studies versus sociology work. There was an opening there! I was interested in the sociology of sex and gender, and women's studies needed people so it worked.

37:00 How have you seen the field of women's studies evolve? Its kind of hard to answer. The number of studies and writings that have been done are just astronomical. That was not true when I first started. Interest in ballroom dance and literature on it. Students able to research any issue. How has it changed? We've burgeoned and gotten lots of new recruits. We've been historically affected by waves of feminism – third wave feminism shook things up. Second wave was dominated by political correctness, but third wave feminism, ... all of the things that have been criticized have to be relooked at again. The idea of looking at gender rather than just sex for identities and how we should treat people and social structures that validate people – that's all new. So third wavers, I don't agree with some of them, but I think its opened up a lot. You don't have to worry if you're

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one of the sisterhood; now, if you can give a fairly reasoned justification for what your perspective in then it's acceptable. And I think that's good because it opens up dialogue.

42:01 Is there a link/should there be a link between advocacy and academia? Discussion about relationships between activism and academy. Discussion about personal activism.

46:10 Do you see much activism on our campus? Not that much, but there is some with SAGE and VOX and V-Day and MARS (men against rape) and other student organizations.

47:20 How do you think the status of women has changed? More women faculty members today. We are very female dominated, which is incredible. I still think, and know, that in administration it is male dominated. I think this will change and even out ...because of the numbers. You can't keep these few men in charge (not that they are bad!) and some of the women I wouldn't want to have in charge, but in all fairness statistically we should have more of a balance of leadership. Things have been cut though – like the Office of Women's Affairs – so I don't think there is as much attention to issues on campus as before.

49:39 Could there be less attention because there's less need? No, I think its funding. There is still a need.

49:59 What do you think have been the biggest successes and challenges? Departmental status has been a huge success. I think we've made steady progress – books have come out, we've hosted conferences, we've brought in authors and had visiting faculty, and we are constantly doing outreach. We work well together and I can't say enough wonderful things about Monika [Shafi] and Jessica Schiffman]. Those are some of the wonderful things. Last year we had a retreat and did a lot of planning for the future. But we have challenges. One of challenges is coordination with other units to dialogue and get good interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Diversity is a challenge, too. We find this in the student body where there is a concerted effort for outreach and making the university a friendly atmosphere and welcoming atmosphere for all people regardless of race or ethnicity or culture. Really difficult to structure a strong feminist program and also be culturally sensitive.

54:37 Anything else you can think of? No, no, it's been a wonderful experience. I expect to retire in about a year and a half and I couldn't have asked for a better work experience in many many ways. I'm happy because of my life-course and how this fit into things and all the wonderful people I've worked with in this program and now department. And my students – wonderful students. I love my students, they are great!

55:36 End of tape.