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

TAPE LOG

Dr Jessica Schiffman is retired Assistant Professor and Assistant Director of the Women and Gender Studies Department at UD.

Name of person(s) interviewed: Jessica Schiffman

Other people present: No one else present

Interviewer: Donna Kelsch

Date of interview: June 14, 2012

Location of interview: Jessica Schiffman's office at in Women and Gender Studies building, 34 West Delaware Ave. Newark

Special conditions (noise, interruptions, etc.): Phone ringing

General description of contents: Discussion of background growing up with feminist household and moments she felt personally influenced her own feminism. Activism in college starting with anti-war and later anti-violence against women. Ideas about how women's studies academics grew out of activism. What brought her to Delaware, and activism with Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Involvement with UD's Women's Studies, Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Concentration. Students involvement with department. Organizing department, views on resistance. Links between activism and academics. S-contracts and part-time positions. Struggle for tenure lines, evolving curriculum, concentrations, relationship with BAMS. Mission of Women's Studies at UD. Moment that meant a great deal to her. What she would say to critics. Fundraising. Have things changed in feminism?

Recording Format and disc number: Video interview

Total Running Time: 1:34:11

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0:40 Discussion about background. Moved around a lot as child, born in Manhattan, moved to rural community in Carlisle PA, lived in India and France. Attended all girls boarding school Linden Hall. What it was like being a girl. Mixed messages, late 50s-70s. Mother was determined feminist. Grew up in feminist household. Out of sync with community around them. Strong influence of mother.

5:14 Discussion about younger brother and gender differences, newspaper route versus babysitting. Early experience of sex discrimination.

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6:10 Travel to India, around age 12. Gender messages that confirmed own feminism.

7:53 Comes from 3 generations of feminists, Experiencing limitations because female.

9:08 Became activist in college, beginning of women's movement, political action at American University. Active in anti-war movement, not dismissed because woman, non-violence training & civil disobedience trainer. Discussion about D.C. women's movement, and starting first rape crisis center, including issue about what role men could play.

12:00 Phone rings.

12:35 Discussion about men in movement and what role they can play, conflicted about not including men because her father was supportive. Felt equal to men. First exposure to separatist ideas, aha moment about thinking what feminism is, and what it means to be involved, movement's goals. Anti-violence against women movement, where she fit.

14:54 Active in women's movement. Participated in pro-choice activism. Mother adamant and encouraged education about it, had an abortion in college, told parents about it, failure of Dalkon Shield IUD and gave payout from class action suit to Planned Parenthood. Moved to Olympia Washington. Volunteer at NOW to find out about community and get engaged in action. Anti-rape crisis center volunteer. Radical politics, overturning relationship between men and women, changing people's reality about bodies, lobbyist for abortion rights.

20:14 Academics – women's studies created as a result of activism. Activist women questioned why women were not being included in traditional disciplines. Women's studies was direct outgrowth of feminist desire to see activism in academic environment. Limitation of activism in academic life. Connection of activism to the Domestic Violence Prevention and Services Concentration.

24:50 Move to Delaware. Parents were elderly, first grandchild. Gave up position at rape crisis/battered women's shelter, went back to graduate school to get a degree to enhance capacity to work on issues of violence against women. Chose Sociology department at UD because commute easier than Temple with baby. Excellent professors. Rape crisis movement demanding and exhausting, lots of pressure, no financial support. Discussion about grassroots movement. No one had time to write about experiences, connect scholarship with activist work, wanted to be more effective, led to Domestic Violence Prevention and Service program.

29:00 Met Carol Post, good friends, both had interest in women's issues and kids same age. Worked together with community to create DE Coalition Against Domestic Violence DE only state without it. Years later Verizon approached them about creating DVPS program, to create advocates to go out into community. Closure for retirement.

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32:55 Involvement with WOMS. 1986 – started teaching at UD as adjunct. Sandra Harding asked her to develop course for violence against women. Led to other things. When Kathy Turkel, left position as coordinator in 1988 Jessica was hired.

34:42 Nancy Wingate preceded Kathy. Structure of women’s studies changed. Took a lot of effort from a lot of people to create it. Problems and strengths.

37:20 Was not present for early years of program. Only heard stories. Lucky to have strong core of feminist faculty on campus who have lasted. Strongest program in area, best organization. Maggie Anderson, Sandra Harding, Marian Palley, Bonnie Scott, Beth Haslett, Barbara Kelly, Lindy Geis, were all active in early years. Wanted women’s studies to succeed despite different views. Sandra particularly good at bringing new faculty in.

41:27 Discussion about President Trabant’s Commission on the Status of Women. Dealt with faculty students staff etc, strong, made campus feel feminist friendly. Office of Women’s affairs and W.S. acted in concert. Liane Sorenson and Donna Tuites were influential. Mae Carter led OWA.

43:00 Question about resistance to women’s studies. Not a big problem at UD though there were pockets of resistance. Lucky to have Trabant, influenced by his mom who was accomplished and non-traditional. His wife Jerry Trabant taught first course on violence against women. Small skirmishes about some issues but they get “squelched.” Some provosts didn’t want to give W.S. departmental status, some non supportive deans but also supportive provosts and deans, improved over time.

46:00 Discussion about program policy making. Don’t really have official policies. Discussion about retreat in 2011, had focus groups of students about minors, majors, etc, findings taken to retreat to address what students want. Important for future of department to spend time talking individually with students. Making sure to hear and encourage voices of students, want them to feel like department is open door. Students active searching them out. No official mechanism to bring students routinely into decision-making. Encouragement of students’ voices on campus as agents of change, student caucus brought morning after pill to campus.

51:25 Question about links between activism and program? Current Domestic Violence movement nationally is not about politics but social work. Lost piece about activism so wanted to shape community of young activists who would be critical, and create activist community, want to politicize what has been depoliticized. Organizations in community reach out to department for support and appropriate for department to be engaged.

55:00 Discussion about S-contracts, 2 for Sue, 2 for Kathy per semester. Part time, temporary workers. Sandra’s way to create positions for Kathy and Sue, determined to have positions made full time regular. Struggle about that because not every director wanted that. Tenure track hires v. part time; continuity of teaching capacity. Increase to $\frac{3}{4}$ position which gave them benefits. Faculty demoralized about it and felt

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underappreciated, biggest struggle internally in terms of development. Eventual success in creating Continuing non-tenure track positions for Kathy and sue.

1:00:00 One director felt Kathy/Sue doing themselves disservice by settling, should apply for regular faculty tenure line positions because qualified. They felt dismissed. Tension because viewed it differently, not about giving them benefits but about growing department with non tenure or tenure faculty. Can't grow department on non tenure track lines. Determined to have tenured faculty and see two PhD's in jobs they are qualified for.

1:02 Discussion about faculty positions and how over half faculty non tenured positions and are held primarily by women.

1:04:35 Discussion about name. Feminist studies department versus women's studies department. Names mean something. UD was deliberate. Curriculum changed dramatically as new issues come to surface, growth spurt since inception, initially taught little in LGBT but now woven into curriculum, race/ethnicity. Attempts years ago to create concentrations within women's studies.

1:07:45 Phone rings

1:08:21 Concentrations in Sexualities and Gender Studies, race/ethnicity, global issues. Director didn't want SGS, Subjects were being taught and embraced in curriculum early. Curriculum engaged arising issues, example of transnationalism, really good job at staying current and moving to forefront of some issues.

1:10:38 Discussion about WOMS and other programs and departments at UD. Lots of overlap between WOMS and BAMS, joint appointments, also Latin American studies. Good collaborative work since early days. BAMS trajectory different because legislative mandate and funding for tenure track faculty. Continue to look out for each other.

1:13:29 Discussion about Departmentalization. People thought women's studies was a department back in the 80s. Operating as a department for so long that won't make much difference to students, meaningful for university community, more institutional strength and visibility. Hope that eventually chair of women's studies will come from W.S. faculty.

1:16:30 Changes in WOMS: sometimes students out ahead of department and sometimes vice versa. Faculty have had to push race as part of curriculum, students sometimes resist. Department attracts students of color, work at making connection with diversity. Few older returning students. Haven't addressed all possible diversities of women's voices in terms of student body. Constantly changing landscape so always challenged to recognize experiences students bring to us and experiences that they want to bring to students.

1:20:30 Mission of women's studies in beginning. Early on purpose was to introduce material on women. Determined to see disciplines integrate new scholarship about women. Encourage campus to recognize scholarship being done about women. Add and stir, was a lot simpler (example of History of Women

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course). As material became more available and as academics were more encouraged to produce material, work became more highly valued.

1:23:45 Faculty members as creators of knowledge who push the envelope. Need tenure lines because other positions teaching focused. Need time and capacity for research. Now there's publishing coming out of women's studies. Need people with years ahead of them to create scholarship, good to have established scholars like Quintana and Stetz. Also need new generation. Our next phase.

1:26:00 Proudest of development of DVPS concentration. Reason came back to graduate school, connect making real change in real world with scholarship and activism. Feels like she can be done now. Hopes DVPS goes on forever, hope for addition of sexual assault component to it.

1:27:14 What else needs to be addressed? Funding issues. 1. Women as philanthropists. 2. Relatively new alumni base so don't have older wealthier people yet. 3. Women still aren't making what men make. Administration sees fundraising as job of academic departments but she doesn't agree. Difference between educational institutions and business. We now put financial value on everything but thinks it's a mistake.

1:30:08 What do you say to critics who don't think women's studies is legitimate? Sex/gender inequality is very apparent, critics don't have open eyes, all around us every day, endemic to society we live in which is how can become blind to it.

1:32:00 Have things changed with feminism? Yes, historical change is tremendous, Steven Pinker book – (The Better Angels of Our Nature) - looks at violence over time all cultures all disciplines and says that violence seems prevalent and growing is because we've become less tolerant of it even though actually less violence happens, change happens but need historical perspective to appreciate it.

End of interview