[0:01:32.0]

[Video: IMG_1572.mov]

KOUHI: It's my pleasure to be here. What's your full name?

KENNEY: Nancy J. Kenney.

KOUHI: When were you born?

KENNEY: Believe it or not February 19, 1949, 65 years ago yesterday.

KOUHI: Happy birthday.

KENNEY: Thank you. It has been quite an adventure.

[0:02:02.6]

KOUHI: Can you tell about family and your background?

KENNEY: I grow up in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. My mother completed high school. My father had dropped out of school in 8th grade in order to support the family, but over time he did collect his high school diploma and actually worked towards an Associate Degree in Engineering as sort of a part-time thing, but I don't think he ever completed it, at least I never heard that he ever completed it. My parents purchased and ran a wholesale candy distribution business about six months after I was born and worked together to build that into a pretty substantial local company that still exists. By the time I was graduating in high school the company was finally working and becoming profitable. But I grew up in quite a working class world where education was looked at as something you had to do.

My parents' dream, of course—both of my parents had dreamed about going to college, and so their dream was that their children would go to college, and I'm

their baby. My brother and sister did not fulfill their dream. And so I was told – despite my lack of interest – that I would go to college, period. Not only would I go to college, but they determined what school I would go to because I could not move out of their home. They had this strong belief that you did not move out of your parents' home until you were at least twenty-one. So I was told I could not leave home, even to go to school. And in the small town that I grew up in, there were actually some small colleges, and that's where I ended up going to school.

My whole education career has been nothing but a series of naïve missteps that worked out very well, really. One, I didn't want to go to college. When my parents insisted – I was a very obedient child, and so I indeed did apply to college – the school that they insisted upon – it was a very tiny place – required you to pick a major before you even started. Being that I didn't want to school, I didn't want to major in any anything I ever heard of. So once I eliminated all the courses that I'd ever studied in my life, I was left with psychology and sociology as possible majors, and I literally pulled psychology out of a hat. And that's how I become a psychologist, believe it or not.

So my whole life has just been this crazy set of things, I ended up in graduate school in Psychology studying Behavioral Neuroscience. Again, totally naïvely, not knowing what I was doing but loving what I was doing. And I honestly ended up here at the University of Washington, in Psychology and then Women Studies for exactly the same kind of accidental missteps that worked out perfectly. I am not a person that I would ever want anyone to model their career goals on because I just sort of bumbled my way through. But perhaps it's typical of someone who is a first generation college student, a first generation graduate student, a first generation faculty. I had no idea how the system worked, and I just did what I thought worked, and it paid off. Students wouldn't succeed very well at that today.

[0:07:11.0]

KOUHI: Amazing. When did you first become involved with feminism, or feminist activism?

KENNEY: Honestly? When I took the job here, honestly. In retrospect I was much more of a feminist as child and a college student than I knew. My mother was a feminist as well, but she, to the day she died, denied that fact. Somehow the word didn't fit, but she was my first teacher of feminism, and she was a very strong supporter of women's roles in the world and women's rights. Even though she was also— I'd never say she was a traditional housewife because she never was at home with the children, she was always at work. But she was a very traditional Catholic woman who fought the church left and right. Who argued that society was anti-women. She was my first trainer in feminism and I was able to tell that, after I moved here.

As a college student I was more into anti-war activities than into feminist activities, but they sort of overlapped with each other. But the school I was at was so conservative, behind the times. I often joke that they got to their first Vietnam War demonstration somewhere around 1985. It was kind of an interesting world to live in. But when I came out here as a faculty member of Women Studies, all of it came home to roost and I became very much a feminist activist, but mostly in the academy. To me the development and growth of the department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies has been my activism for the last nearly 40 years. And when I came the program was so new, it was so weak, it was so tenuous. And we dared to dream about what it would look like, and what we dreamt is what it is, and that has been activism.

[0:10:31.3]

KOUHI: Wow. What were your goals as a young feminist?

KENNEY: As a young feminist? As I said, my activism was in this department, and therefore my goals were to see the department live, that was number one, it had to survive. And that was really questionable at the very beginning. It had to survive and it had to be respected, I didn't think I would live long enough for that one, but I did. And it was going to be a solid academic program. And those were my dreams: that people would no longer question why this discipline exists and what its value is to the academy or to society and that students would come here and be changed. That was my dream, and that is fortunately what has happened.

[0:11:52.1]

KOUHI: When you came to the University of Washington what were the political and social issues at that time? I know that you kind of focused on Vietnam War.

KENNEY: The Vietnam War issue had been quieting down, but out of those protests and in conjunction with all of the Civil Rights, human rights protests that sort of built out of the era you had universities and colleges introducing what were considered political action academics. This is the era of the introduction of Ethnic Studies, Women's Studies to the academy, as really a way to appease the students. The students we're rioting; the students weren't happy; the students were questioning the value of the university and its application to the real world. And to calm students, many universities and colleges introduced these speciality programs which, really, I don't think they intended to survive. These were programs that we're going to be brought in to the system just so they could say they did something. And then as students went back to the classrooms and became their apathetic selves again, they could drop all these things and go on their merry way, and the university would continue unchanged. It didn’t work, obviously, for the university. They didn't know what they were getting into.

Particularly with this Women Studies program, it really was intended, I think, to be a very short-term process. For that reason the early faculty of the program-- I was the second person, Sue-Ellen Jacobs was first – we were both hired as half-time in Women Studies and half-time in what the university thought as a "real discipline" – I was in Psychology, she was in Anthropology. And the sense I got was that this had to be the way it was done, and I had to be not a feminist scholar but a traditional psychology scholar because I needed a home when the program was disbanded. That was never directly stated but you could sense it in the entire undercurrents of the time.

There was always this question of, "So what are you doing? Why? What? Why are you there?" We were asked that question so many times it was amazing. There was a period of time in the '70s and '80s when the Dean of Arts and Sciences changed frequently. And always to a man – they were all men – they would begin their discussion of their tenure at the university, as saying, "I'm going to look into how you are investing our money," basically, and questioning the value of various departments. And they would put Women Studies right out there as questionable department. Should we keep this thing? Are we wasting our money? And I think for two or three of the Deans we literally ran bi-weekly educational forums on what Women Studies was. I mean, it was ridiculous. You would never ask Biology or Psychology or English to explain their value. It would go on, and on, and on. And then they would change deans and we would do it all over again. And it was crazy; it was an absolutely crazy time on campus. That was the big issue: survival.

[end: IMG_1572.mov]

KENNEY: I actually want to continue with that one for just one more second. And there was an equal question with survival.

KOUHI: If you want to continue you can just continue anything that you want to say.

KENNEY: I do want to answer that question with one more step, because there were two types of questions. There was the question of what happens with Women Studies in the university, and then there was the in house question of what is a Women's Studies Department at a university.

[Audio interruption 0:18:28.6 to 0:20:41.3]

[Video: IMG_1576.mov]

Within the program there was another thing which was: is Women Studies an academic program or is it a political program? And the structure of the program at the time with Sue-Ellen as director, me as the only faculty member, and then we had the Women Studies advisory committee which was made up of students and staff and community members. And that group was very much a believer that the program should be political. They didn't like the rules of the university, so we were often told to go get more money from the college but tell the Dean to leave us alone. And it was like, “Ooh, can’t – don't work that way.” So it was an interesting struggle which involved hours.

We used to have advisory committee meetings that went on for five or six hours a time, it was just amazing. But the big debate was: What is it? What should we develop into? How should we be? And it was difficult, it was exciting. And when we were then awarded another faculty position, when they—we finally got the Dean to agree that there could be a full-time faculty position in Women Studies – and we chose at that point to hire a historian – our advisory committee was actually against it. They were not against the historian, they were against any assistant professor being hired into the program.

Part of the problem is that they wanted someone who was more of a feminist scholar and they were looking at what was already there. Sue-Ellen was an outstanding feminist scholar from the get-go. I was not. I was trained in

traditional psychobiology and in biopsychology. There was no feminist training, other than what I gave myself, but it was—

[End: IMG_1576.mov]

[Audio interruption: 0:23:47.5 to 0:24:21.8]

[Video: IMG_1577.mov]

Anyhow, that was the big debate. And when I finally figured out that that was the big problem, it was easy enough to assure the board that, "No we weren't going to hire another me. That what we were looking for was someone trained in feminist studies." Actually, we didn't use that word back then, we only called it Women Studies. Feminist was a very bad word on campus at that time, and so we didn't use it at all.

It was kind of interesting, and it sort of resulted in the pattern that you've seen of our faculty group, over the whole forty years that we have been around where it took a strong activist to be the Head of the program. When the first faculty was hired – which was me – it had to be someone who was really rooted elsewhere but committed there. And then, as the status of the program became more secure and then respected, you see this shift to full-time faculty, to more interdisciplinary scholars, to more strong feminist research, until we get to today, where we have the most amazing feminist scholars on earth housed in this department. And it's been a big change. But that was a huge controversy back then, of, "What does a faculty member look like?"

[0:26:18.4]

KOUHI: What was the department like when you first started?

KENNEY: Well, there was Sue-Ellen and me and a program secretary who actually was trying to get the program either completely radicalized or destroyed, one or the other. So that was really fun, to have that problem. It was totally disrespected on campus. It was talked about as something that would go away. It was a very

different kind of world. And it was also, in contrast to the world I lived in in Psychology – Psychology was a massive department at that time, and a very research-oriented department –Women Studies was tiny, it was dedicated to teaching. That was its main mission: undergraduate education; exposing that era's college students to research on women and really exciting stuff, actually, from the very beginning.

The only reason that they hired me was because they wanted to teach courses that a psychologist could teach. One of them was Psychobiology of Women, which already existed. I actually never knew who taught it, but it was taught here before I was hired. And when they tried to offer it one quarter, Psychology intervened and said, "No, you can't have a course with psychology in the title, or psychobiology in the title, that is not taught by a psychologist." That was sort of the impetus for why they chose— when they were given their very first faculty appointment, why they chose to share it with Psychology, rather than any other department on campus, because they wanted Psychobiology of Women taught. And they wanted what was then called Psychology of Sex Differences, taught. And they literally, before when they were looking for this particular faculty person, when they came to their short list of potential candidates, they actually had all of us prepare a syllabus for those two courses before we would be considered further for the position.

I will never forget the day I got a call from Sue-Ellen asking me to submit the syllabus for Psychobiology of Women and Psychology of Sex Differences, along with a reading list for the courses to her within 48 hours. So I had 48 hours to put these things together and get them to Seattle. And this is in the era where you had overnight mail delivery for an atrociously high amount of money. There certainly was no electronic communication taking place. So I literally had 24 hours to put together these two syllabi. And the cool thing was that when I put together the Psychobiology of Women syllabus I fell in love with it and said, "I will teach that

course no matter where I go. I don't care where my job is, I'm going to teach that course." And I've done it, I've taught every year since and it has been great. Psych of Sex Differences I taught until about ten years ago, although it changed names, Psych of Gender, but it was a really exciting and fun time for me. We would never be able to do that to our faculty these days, but it's kind of fun.

But it was a very tiny place. It was very dedicated to teaching. And over here in Psychology we never talked about teaching. Teaching was a taboo topic, we only talked about research. Over there it was all about teaching and it was that the students were clearly different in the two departments. I could tell in a classroom which of my students were Women Studies students and which were Psych students. Because the Psych students took notes, and Women Studies students were constantly asking questions and challenging everything you said – they were so much more fun to work with. Over time the two groups have become more similar, but it was really kind of fascinating at that time.

[0:32:02.5]

KOUHI: How have students at UW changed over time?

KENNEY: (exhales intensely) You know, less than you think, really. There are more students. As I just said, the Psych students and the Women Studies students have become similar. And when I say that I mean that the Psych students have become more like the Women Studies students. They are less likely to passively accept information being presented in a classroom without questioning it. And that's exciting, that's fun. And so in that way there's been a big change.

The diversity of students on the campus is much greater than it was. There are so many more students of color on this campus than there were in the '70s. Students are older than they were in the '70s, there were more traditional college-age students back then. Obviously we still have a lot of traditional college-age

students, but we also have a lot of older students. There were a lot fewer international students and a lot fewer immigrant students, just a huge change that's taken place in all of those arenas, which has just resulted, of course, in a much more fascinating and enriched student body. But basically it was kind of a bland vanilla back then. That's not to say there not students of color but there certainly were so many fewer of any background other than Seattle. It's just exciting to see what's happened.

[0:34:28.3]

KOUHI: Are you involved in feminist work outside the university?

KENNEY: Nope. I work entirely within the university. Like I said, to me the nurturing and growth of this program has been my activism. Which is awful, I mean I almost hate say it because it is critical to me, and I urge, encourage, cajole, force my undergraduate students to be involved in the community because I really believe that we have to be there. I dream, actually, of retirement when I will have time, to spend more time in the community than I do now. But this has been exhausting work, it has been hard work. And it's rationalization, I realize that. But to say that prepping what has turned up to be tens of thousands of students to be involved in their communities, it's not bad activism. I'll take it.

[End: IMG_1577.mov]

I have to tell about a part of Women Studies that you are not going to ask about but it has to be in this. And that is the part where we were targets of society.

KOUHI: Do you want me to record that?

KENNEY: Sure, I do. I think it's really important because there aren't many people around. I know Sue-Ellen will talk about it when she is interviewed. But there were a

number of cases, and two outstanding ones in the '80s where our department was explicitly targeted by outside individuals or groups in a very violent way.

KOUHI: I'm going to ask this question but feel free to—

[Video: IMG_1578.mov]

KENNEY: OK, well why don't you ask them, we'll see where they go.

[0:37:19.3]

KOUHI: What do you see are the most pressuring feminist issues today?

KENNEY: Most pressured feminist issues of today? We are going through another period of tremendous conservative backlash. It is more subtle than it was. In the issues that are most critical to me in terms of women's biological and reproductive rights, tremendous reversal of gains as we watched the various States slowly erode abortion rights. Not slowly actually, very dramatically erode abortion rights. The use of reproductive technology in many ways that are very, very useful to women but also in ways that are smacking of eugenics and the control of the "quality" of the population. Scary stuff, as far I'm concerned. And so we see a lot of that happening – that's very, very important.

The relative apathy of the young women is kind of scary. That has actually improved in the last few years, but we have gone through a period where young women were born into a society of women's rights and therefore think that they are foundational and impenetrable and never-changing. And I think what they have seen with the changes in particularly the abortion laws over the last five years, is that any of this stuff could disappear overnight if we're not careful. And that's gotten more and more women active in protecting the system and concerned about the system. But that is where I see the big challenge is taking place, it's frightening. And I'm only speaking within the U.S.

The reality is that women across the world basically have no rights. We are spoiled rotten here in the rights we do have, no matter how incomplete they are, and in most countries women would dream to have what we have. We need to work across the world. The continued use of violence against women, of rape and pillaging to achieve political ends. You're going to make me go off on my soapbox here. Those are kinds of things I see as huge challenges.

[End: IMG_1578.mov]

[Audio interruption: 0:41:00.1 to 0:41:17.9]

KOUHI: Do you want to continue?

KENNEY: No, I will just get on my soap box and start preaching about how we have to save the world. So many issues that are so important.

[Video: IMG_1579.mov]

[0:41:46.2]

KOUHI: How do you see feminism evolving in the future?

KENNEY: Do I have to dream, or is going to be reality? I hope feminists will become more and more active in the political system, not only in the U.S. but around the world, to fight for women's rights. We haven't gotten very far even in the U.S. in terms of getting large terms of women active in the political system. And the political system is what is going to control rights over time, here and in every other country. If we can't get large numbers of women active in politics in the U.S., where is safe to be in politics, where most of our candidates are not threatened with danger to their life of their families, how are going to get the rest of the world active? So I see feminism as needing to be directed in that way.

At the same time, we need to pay more attention to the grassroots feminist efforts that are made in various cultural communities throughout the world where women – basically what my mother did – quietly are educating themselves and their daughters and hopefully their sons to understand the value of women in the world and their importance. And I think that's another place where feminism has got to concentrate – in those little private enclaves. So it's sort of the two ends of a spectrum: the very public political and the very private political are the areas that I think most of the work is going to have to be done.

[End: IMG_1579.mov]

[Audio interruption, silence: 0:44:20.1 to 0:44:32.0]

[Video: IMG_1580.mov]

[0:44:35.3]

KOUHI: How do we get more young people involved in GWSS or feminism?

KENNEY: Oh I wish I had the answer to that, I really do. I often talk to young women like yourself who tell me that they got involved in these issues, they started to pay attention to these issues because of a course they took. A course they took in high school, or in community college, or here on campus. And how do we get people to do that? This is kind of scary because the educational system is moving more and more toward occupational education. If it's not geared toward a job, it's not of value. And that's puts issues related to feminism – which are not direct lines to any employment, but are direct lines to a successful society – on hold. And so how do we want to stop this insane idea that education has to be entirely job preparation education? And then, at the same time, entice students. Even back in high schools because that's where we have the most uniformity in terms of access to classes. Get people to actually start learning about the importance of women's rights, the role that gender plays, the role that sexuality plays, the role that ethnicity plays in people's access to the real world resources.

Here we go again; I can get really angry about this stuff. But I think we have to get more and more courses into the high schools. The kinds of things that we teach in Intro to Women Studies or Intro to GWSS are things that should be taught in high schools. I could tell you that back when I started to teach Psychobiology of Women, believe it or not that was just about the time that sex education entered high schools in the U.S. And I assumed that within five years I would be out of a job, that this course would not be at all interesting to college students because it would be all "Heh," it would be, "Eh, had that. It's elementary." It hasn't happened in forty years.

We need to start getting more and more of this into the younger generation so we can start people thinking about these issues earlier, and earlier and earlier. And that is going to be a challenge in the academic climate of the world right now where everything is, "And so what job are you preparing for?" That's the big question that anyone who is not an engineer or a scientist or a pre-med, is being asked this days. And, "Why are you wasting your time? Why are you learning this stuff? Why are you reading Foucault? Why would care about Judith Butler? What is going on here? Sandra Harding? This is silly stuff." And yet it has such a big impact on people's lives because we live our lives as gendered, sexual, racial beings. And how the world treats us is dependent on that. And if we don't understand that, there are a lot of us who are going to be left out of the system. And so I think that's what we have to do, we have to get more and more people involved. The trick is how to do it.

A couple of years ago Priti appointed me as Head of Undergraduate Education in GWSS and that's part of my job, to try to figure out how to get people to take our classes. It's hard. It's really tough to get people to realize what's there. And often, when they finally get to take the course it's too late in their training. They are like, "Oh, I would love to follow up on this, but I can't because I have to get out of here." And of course, we now have these rules about how many credits you can

have before you have do graduate, and all those good things. And so our need for "efficiency" in education is fighting us on that. So we are just looking for more and more ways to get the word out to first year students. To get the word out to people who are just transferring in about what this topic is all about. And fortunately we have excellent colleagues at the community colleges who help us with that, that's fantastic.

[End: IMG_1580.mov]

[Audio interruption: 0:50:42.2 to 0:51:06.9]

KOUHI: I'm going to go to the next question and if you want to add a topic, you can feel free to do so.

KENNEY: OK.

[Video: IMG_1581.mov]

[0:51:24.5]

KOUHI: What are your goals going forward today?

KENNEY: My goals are my goals for the department. My goals are really for the department. I really want to see us grow as stronger scholars, a large community that works together. If we can just take what we have right now – we have a pretty phenomenal department right now – if we could simply grow it because there are so many issues to be dealt with and the field is so big and we can only do so tiny, tiny bit – that would be important to me. To assure— well, at least for now we have an assurance that every student on campus will take at least one course related to diversity. That is a big step; I can't tell you how many decades we fought for that one, but if we could just get more students aware of what we do. And to the get to the point, I've had way too many students who say, "This is really cool stuff, but you can only talk about this at the university. It's not relevant to real life." When I think what we teach is real life.

To get more students to understand that who they are as a person – whether it's by virtue of their gender identity, whether is by virtue of their sexuality, whether is by virtue of their ethnic heritage or their socio-economic background, or their geographic upbringing, whatever it is – all of that has a major role to play in how they fit into the world and how the world will work with them. And the more people we get to understand that, the better. And often college students are reluctant to hear any of that.

We have a lot of students who enter into college – especially traditional college-aged students – who feel that they are really free to do whatever they want to do. And when they run into road blocks, when they struggle with specific kinds of courses, they blame themselves as opposed to questioning what is it about their identity that has influenced their preparation for that kind of work or influenced their understanding because the people who were teaching them can't relate to the students' background, to the students' experience. All of that stuff is so critical to how we succeed in the world, right? It's going to influence—

It's also critical when I think about how this country interacts with other countries. If you don't have that positionality, understanding of people's lives, how do you do that? How do you have any sort of diplomacy? How do you have any sort of business relationship with people in other places if you don't understand that there isn't only way to see the world? And it just seems to me that what we do is so central to success as human beings in this world, that I think we need to find ways to make it— Maybe we can require everybody has to be a minor (laughs). I can dream, can't I?

[End: IMG_1581.mov]

Why not, let's just dream.

[0:56:05.7]

KOUHI: Yeah, that's one of my dreams too. I'm from Afghanistan.

KENNEY: OK. When did you leave Afghanistan?

KOUHI: I left when I was eight.

KENNEY: I assume you have family still in Afghanistan?

KOUHI: Yes, I have many relatives there.

KENNEY: Yeah.

KOUHI: They don't totally understand me.

KENNEY: Well, I'm sure they don't understand you. But do you find that we don't understand you either? Because the world you came from, the world you know is so different.

KOUHI: It is.

KENNEY: I'm glad you're here, rather than there. And I don't know, that's probably a hard statement for you because that's home.

KOUHI: Yeah, it is home. But I'm glad that I have all these opportunities, and I'm learning about myself and about society and how society has been structured for the benefit of some people.

KENNEY: Right. You know, just like class is structured for the benefit, basically of the person who is teaching it, because the design it. They hope that they are meeting the needs of students, right? People design countries and political systems to meet the needs of this little tiny group and everybody else is just a pawn who struggles to survive within that structure.

[0:57:55.4]

KOUHI: Yeah. You mentioned about now in classes they are focusing more on research than teaching us students. I see that in almost every class that I take, it's more about doing research on students than—

KENNEY: Well, this is your research-based university. But research, like teaching, can consider all of those issues. It makes it very difficult. It's so much easier if you assume that all humans all the same, right? And you can then study humans, and those of us in Biology have been really good at this: the belief that there is a basic biological system that we can understand. Now we are learning that a person's lived experience, their experience of stress, their experience of trauma, their experience of poverty is actually changing their biological structures. They are not all the same. And that this frivolous stuff, this social stuff that we think is just "Ick" is really changing our biological structure.

That's the fun thing I have in Psychobiology of Women because when I started doing this course the word "biology" was as dirty in Women Studies as the word "feminism" was outside of Women Studies, really. The idea that there were biological differences amongst people, particularly the genders, was like, "Wow. No!" There were very few of us in Women Studies. As a matter of fact, we used to meet as a group at the National Women's Studies Association meetings because we were such a tiny group that would use biological concepts. And the belief of society then – as is very much the belief now – is that somehow biology is foundational and immutable. Whatever you are programed by your genes, that's it, you're stuck. And if you find out that something is genetically or in any biological sense controlled, that's the nature, that's the unchangeable.

Having been trained in biology, I knew biology was not immutable. We change biology all the time. We change biology by what we eat and by putting a sweater

on. We change biology all the time. And when I would hear feminist scholars say, "Oh, the reason that women act differently than men is because of these cultural, social expectations," and I'm sitting there going, if you believe that, the only way you can change anything is by changing an entire culture. I can't even believe you can do that. If you could tell me I could change— for example, one of the arguments was that women were not achievement-motivated, they were not interested in achievement. Of course achievement was defined in a very specific way, and we obviously have come a long way from that, but there was this whole social-cultural side that argued, "Oh, it's because of their upbringing, and da-da-da, all we have to do is to change all that" And there was another group that said "Wait a minute, there is a biological basis for this. And if we could just modify this biology, we can change all that." Of course all of that is crazy, but my argument was always, "Give me a pill." It is so much easier to take a medication to change everything than it is to change society.

So really it was very funny to be a biologist in this field because people had strange ideas about biology. And then we had the shift in Feminist Studies to "Ooh, it's got biological basis," which happened when the studies on the biological basis of homosexuality came out, and it was like "Oh, now biology is really cool because this is not a social-cultural—it's a biological!" and it's like, "No wait, no, no. You can't go that route." So it's really funny when both sides use the arguments. And now we know that biology and culture, experience, everything, are so tightly intertwined, and they're changing each other all the time. And I just love talking about that. And physicists hate me saying it. They think their science is pure. Oh yeah, sure.

KOUHI: Oh god. It's very [Audio disruption: 1:03:55.5 to 1:04:04.9]

KENNEY: Because of the two departments— I've worked in Women Studies, we've talked about the social construction of race. I can't remember when we didn't talk about

the social construction of race: that race is not a real thing, it's a social construction – we have beliefs about it. And just two or years ago a faculty member in Psychology in a private meeting whispered that he wished he could talk about the possibility that race was a social construction. And I was like, "What? The possibility?!" It boggles my mind how far behind some field are, and Biology is even further behind than Psychology. Then you get into the other sciences and they get even worse. So it is crazy, there's a lot to do.

KOUHI: Yes, there is a lot to do.

KENNEY: I still love the opportunity to at least drive a little wedge into that belief that there is such a thing as "nature" and another thing called "nurture," and somehow or other nature is this thing, this hard fixed thing that can't be changed when we change all the time.

[1:06:17.6]

KOUHI: If you want to talk about anything else? I'm pretty much done with the questions that I asked but if you want to add anything?

KENNEY: I want to go back and talk about the political challenges that this department has faced and the field of Women's Studies has faced, by either self-appointed or socially appointed individuals who have worked very hard to destroy us.

As I said, we have had a couple of examples throughout our history where

[Video: IMG_1582.mov]

students – in both cases male students – have challenged us publically, in one case publicly in local media as well as in the legislature as well as on such fascinating outlets as *The Oprah Show*. Good old Oprah got involved in interviewing people who argued that Women Studies was anti-male. That we were a waste of taxpayer

money and indeed we had an entire year that we spent dealing with the university; dealing with the press; dealing with the legislature – we actually were called to Olympia for a special session to discuss what horrors we were teaching our students.

My own experience with one of these individuals took place in…

[End: IMG_1582.mov]

Excuse me a second. Ah! 1989. It's something else that reminds me of when the date was. It was in...

[Video: IMG_1583.mov]

'89/'90, somewhere in there, where a student took my—I think it was so-called Psychology of Sex Differences course, I can't remember if it had changed – no, it must have still been Sex Differences back then. And he was an individual who did not believe that women should be in any position of authority. There was always suspicion that he had registered for the course under the recommendation of some national conservative groups. But he went a little farther than anyone expected him to go. In the classroom— I mean, it was very strange. On the very first day of class as he talked to me, asked questions in the classroom, there was something about his personality – something about his mannerisms that just sort of raised red flags for me. And I actually called the Provost's office right after my first class saying, "I've never done this but there's something strange going on here. And I hope I never talk to you about it, I hope I'm wrong. But I just want you to know there's something strange here." And it's really weird – to this day I don't know what it was about that first class that made me do that. That was something I have never done before in my life and I have never even thought about doing since, but there was something weird there.

This individual became a real annoyance in the class because he liked to talk a lot and he had a theory that women were only capable of menstruating and gestating and lactating. And we actually started referring to his as "lactactional theory of

human behavior." He eventually – he was annoying but that's what it is – toward the end of quarter he went to The Daily and tried to take an ad out in The Daily – a classified ad – that basically said something like, "AK 47 like one used in the California schoolyard massacre wanted by Women Studies student" and The Daily did not publish that ad. They called the Provost's office and the President's office, and said, "Woah. What's going on here?" This student— it was very strange, it was very scary. I was informed about what he had said, although I was told not to tell my students what he had said.

This was very close to end of a quarter and my opinion was that he should finish the quarter out in the course. He could come to me saying that he did not think I was qualified to teach at a university. He had gone to my Chairs, I'm not sure if he went to both of them or just one to basically say, "She's incompetent." This was the first quarter that I taught after receiving the university's Outstanding Teaching Award, so I wasn't real concerned about a single student telling anyone that I was incompetent in the classroom. I'm sure there is one every quarter who believes that, and perhaps they are even right sometimes. But he went to the Dean and tried to make the case to get me fired. And he went to the Provost and tried to make case to get me fired. And none of this worked and then came the ad.

And the university took it very, very seriously. They were very concerned about this. They assigned an armed guard to me who went to class with me each time. It was weird because I'm very much an anti-gun person and this person was armed, and I knew he was armed and I, at times, would even see his weapon because he dressed like a student but he had his gun. And I would see his weapon and I would say, "Oh, good, he has a gun. He'd shoot." And then I would stand back and go, "What? What did you just think? This is insane, this is just totally crazy." I did find myself going into the classroom and noting where he was sitting and where the nearest door was. It was very crazy.

And then, one day there was a horrible massacre at the University of Montreal in a Women's Studies class, a gunman and came in and killed a number of students. And within hours of that event this university expelled this guy under presidential emergency order – that was really scary. He was banned from campus and there was some real concern about our safety. I had my wonderful bodyguard – he was so sweet, he was wonderful. He stayed with me and looked after me on campus, but it was so scary that after that, that quarter ended. Like I said, this all happened very close to the end of the quarter. I remember for the final exam that quarter, a student brought a present that they just left on the podium in the classroom and didn't take ownership of it. They just left it, which is something that students do, but I was scared to death. There was this box on the podium and no one told me where it came from, and I didn't want to touch it. It was a very scary thing. It was actually taken away by my friendly guard and investigated. I can't remember what it was, but it was just one of those trivial things that students do for faculty and yet it was so scary.

And the next quarter when I was doing my summer there was so much concern about this guy, that one, I was not allowed to meet with any students in my office. As a matter of fact, I wasn't anywhere near my office at any time. My office was considered dangerous and so if someone came to see me they had to check in at main office here, and they would then be sent to a second person while the first person called me and said, “This is a person who is here to see you, are you expecting this person? And if you are, where should you meet with them?” And I would be given a place where I would have to go to meet with people because couldn't meet in my office. It was a scary time. My students actually had to call in to find out where our class would meet, on a weekly basis. It was really scary.

At the end he did have a hearing. It was a couple of quarters after he was expelled and I had to go to this hearing. He announced before the hearing he was bringing a gun. And I’m like, “Oh, great.” But because he announced it the police were

allowed to search him. And he brought the press with him. Oh, this was in the press. He was doing this wonderful press circuit of radio shows and newspaper and television, and all of it. He was talking about me as a man hater. That really my whole course was designed around condemnation of men and family. I was anti-man and anti-family.

And this was front page in the Seattle Times, it was everywhere. And I had to just—I couldn't say a word, he was a student. You can't talk about students, it's against the law. And so if reporters would call me I would have to say, "I can't comment but if you want to know what I do on my class…" At the time we didn't have podcasts of classes. Back then ASUW hired lecture note takers and they would publish printed lecture notes that students could buy for lecture classes. And I would say to the press, "Go read the lecture notes. They are available, go look at them. I can't tell you what I do but you can go look." They wouldn't. They were just—it was big hot-button story, and so they kept doing it. It was very embarrassing. My husband would run into people and talk and eventually mention that his wife was a faculty member, "That one?!" I mean it was just like, wow, hot stuff! I mean, it was really crazy. It was horrible because this guy's name was the same as my son's, and so if I would talk about him at home my son was like, "I didn't." I was like, "No, no, it's OK."

They finally had this hearing and in the hearing it was really scary. Like I said, he announced he was coming with a gun. He called later, he called my office after the hearing – it was a message on my answering machine because I wasn't in my office – to say he couldn't understand why everyone was so upset that he was bringing a gun because he had a gun in class every day and if he had wanted to kill me he could have killed me anytime. And it was like, "Oh, was that supposed to make me feel better?" "OK. Glad to hear that. I thought you were just—." I was afraid of him strangling me because he would jump up and scream and if I tried to cut him off he would scream at me, veins bulging. So I assumed he would

come up and beat me. But it never occurred to me that he had a gun in the classroom, I just didn't even think about that one.

Anyhow, we get to this hearing and they search him with the press all there, and he had hidden a banana in his pocket so they would find it and look foolish. But he also brought three friends with him, one of whom was the man who had been involved in the previews attack on Women Studies. But they couldn't search the other three people because they had no grounds for searching them.

We went into the hearing and the student spent I guess the better part of two hours explaining how awful I was and all the horrible things I had done. And it was— I had no doubt that everyone in that room realized that he was— "What?!" For example, one of the things he said, that actually got me to respond, and somebody grabbed me and said, "Cut that out!" He asked me if I— he read from the lecture notes, a request that I made that students— a test was coming up and I said you have to bring a pencil and an eraser for the Scantron part of the test. And for those of you that can't write legibly with a pencil please bring a pen to answer the short answer questions. And he reads this, and said, "Did you say that?" and I said, "Yes, I said that." "Isn't that discrimination against the handicapped?" And I went, "What?" So that was the kind of thing. Every phrase he went through was making something out of it that made no sense. And fortunately he was in that room, he was exactly as he was in the classroom and so when they asked me if I had anything to say about him I just said, "His behavior in the classroom was identical to his behavior here today. That's all I'm going to say." And the committee sort of nodded, and that was the end of that. And eventually— the hearing was over, the conclusion eventually was that he was expelled from campus for four years. I was not happy with that because I knew I was still going to be around four years later. As far as I know he never came back. The police kept me aware of where he was for a long time after that, but he never came back to campus that I know of.

After the hearing, the police first escorted him and his three friends off campus, and then they came back because I never went anywhere without my guard and my guard was one of the people who went with him. So I was waiting, and they came back and the three or four cops were laughing. They were just having a jolly time and I looked up and I said, "Hey guys what's so funny? I need a good laugh. Right now I could use a good laugh, so how about the joke?" And the joke was not a joke. The joke was that they have had bets about who had the gun. They knew that one of the three people would have the gun. And my bodyguard was the one who won the pool and he bet that the gun was in the wife's purse and wife's purse was on the table next to this guy the entire time. And I said "What's funny about this? He is up there ranting about me. He's got a gun next to him, how is this funny?" And the guy who was my bodyguard said, "Well that's OK Nancy, I had my hand on my gun the whole time." And I said "Wait, wait, wait. I was sitting between you and him."

This is not a very funny circumstance, but this is the kind of thing we put up with. It was this craziness where there were these ultra-conservatives who didn't believe – and actually ultra-conservative misogynist individuals – who would not believe that women should be doing what we were doing. Who would go to extremes to keep us from doing what we were doing. Who would grab the press and twist them against us in a very violent and prolonged fashion. This went on for most of a year, it was really scary.

I have to say, the university was great to me during that entire time. They were really good in how they protected me, but it was scary. It was a very scary time. And I was like, "Am I supposed to walk around with a gun too?" This is so against my own philosophy and my idea of what should be happening in a classroom. And I was so worried about my students who didn't know what was going on. It was all very, very crazy. I guess we are better people for it in the end, because people recognized the insanity of it. We really did believe that there was

some national organization that had put him up to this but when he got really crazy I think they abandoned him as well.

What was scary—the cops were very worried about his wife. He had a wife and two children or three children and they were convinced that they were abused but they couldn't do anything about it. In one of the interviews with him at the police station, the family was there. There was almost a new-born child and a two-year-old, in addition the wife, and the three of them sat on hard chairs in the police station without moving for two hours. And the cops were convinced that that was an indication of abuse: two-year-olds don't sit still for two hours; infants do not sit still for two hours. It was very scary, and they were very upset that they couldn't grab the kids and protect them, but they never could do that. I often wonder what happened to this guy, where he ended up. But that's the kind of stuff we put up with in the early years. Thank god it hasn't happened again.

[End: IMG_1583.mov]

May it never happen again.

KOUHI: [1:29:45.7] I don't know why they provocate.

KENNEY: Why? I don't understand why somebody would do that. If they don't like what you are doing, he didn't have to be there. He insisted that the only reason he was in that class was because it was the only class available on campus. That class was closed at the time he registered, I gave him an entry code, he had asked to overload into the class. He could have asked to be overloaded into any class, it certainly wasn't the only open class on campus, and so he had an agenda.

The students, at first they listened to him respectfully. And after a while every time he opened his mouth they would literally turn away from him, it was just awful. And of course he believed that I was a horrible person to start with but I

had corrupted the entire class. That the reason they were against him was because I had brainwashed them, not because he had repelled them. It was crazy.

That is something that I don't think should be forgotten in the long run. And I often been tempted – I don't think I ever kept the newspapers from that era, where they condemned me.

KOUHI: I'm proud of you, you are very strong.

KENNEY: Oh, it was crazy, it was very crazy, I did have one faculty member who said to me, "Can't you keep you classes under control?" and I said, "Maybe if the university gave me an AK 47 I could do that".

[End: IMG_1572.mov]