

[Video: Howard_Judy VIDEO FILE.mov]

ARCHER: Lovely. Okay, well thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us today. Will you go ahead and introduce yourself.

HOWARD: Okay. Which leads to the question why you contacted me in particular so I'm Judy Howard. I'm longtime professor at the University of Washington in sociology and also gender women and sexuality studies. What else to you want to know.

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ARCHER: So basically for the interview process we were just able to pick whoever we wanted. Obviously everyone has a very interesting story in this department- can give us a little background on what led you to this department?

HOWARD: Sure. So I came to the university in 1982 and I earned my doctorate at Wisconsin. That was in sociology but there was also a women's studies program there and I took some courses in it before I came here for my job in Sydney Kaplan who's I don't know if you know her she's a faculty member in the English department and was chair of what was then called Women's Studies at that time and she contacted me when I moved here and said you know would you like to be affiliated with the department and we had lunch in and I did become what we call an adjunct faculty member here which means you have your main line is in another department but you indicate some interest in second department. And so I became an adjunct but when I moved here and a bit involved with the department really ever since then one way or another. And then in 2005 I became the divisional Dean of Social Sciences and Women's Studies in that in that division so many different capacity. And then between 2001 and five I had been the chair of the department that was at a time when they didn't have enough typically chairs of full professors and there

weren't enough full professors in the department. And I've been involved enough that I became the chair until I became the official Dean. So I've been involved in it one way or another with with what we now call GWSS for a very very long time.

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ARCHER: Wonderful. So, you earned your PHD from the University of Wisconsin, correct? So when you were studying there, what was the environment that we talked a lot about the evolution of GWSS (Gender, Women, Sexuality Studies) and what that department looks like and how it's evolved over time that you've been at UW vs. when you were first kind of entering that field of interest and study, can you tell us what that was like?

HOWARD: Yes, sure. And it was very different. So the Department of Wisconsin like the one here was one of the very very early ones so they actually had a major in many of these start with sort of a general studies major then at some point or another becomes more official. And Wisconsin was also one of the first to offer a PHD as we were. So they're very similar programs in some ways. And I think how I would describe, the kind of general ethos of what I'll call Women's Studies since that's what it was known as then is it was. A field that really saw itself as being, they wanted wanted to have an academic presence but also wanted at the same time and not see these as contradictory to, to be able to be much more activist than most academic disciplines are, to focus on both research and teaching that would make a difference to things outside the walls of the academy. These days, that's a very popular approach back when it was not at all. So many of the early women's studies programs had to fight tooth and nail to become recognized, to become respected. It was often assumed that people who were faculty in those departments were sort of lightweight or one way or another didn't really weren't as rigorous as faculty in other departments. It was a very different time in. The

early very very early years of the WSJ National Women's Studies Association, the conferences were much more- It's almost like going to political rallies. They were much more activist and not as scholarly as they are now. Now it's more of a planned. But that's certainly what the early years were like. And it was you know in ways that you can imagine. It was kind of a constant struggle to be indicating that what we did was important addressing matters that were of significance in the world and to be recognized as such. Some institutions were. Welcoming of that and some are not. I think it's not an accident that most of the early successful programs were at large high quality public universities and not private schools. So I might note this has come up in your studies yet. But in 1985 so just a few years after I moved here we actually hosted one of the very early National Women's Studies Association conferences here in Seattle. And that was a huge amount of work and I think a very very positive experience for everybody.

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ARCHER: How do you feel that Wisconsin as an environment differs from Seattle in a more metropolitan state?

HOWARD: That's a good question. Have you ever been to Madison?

ARCHER: No.

HOWARD: As a community it's not unlike I mean smaller parts of Seattle actually. It's a very progressive city. Back then it was a progressive state, it is no longer but back then it was. The state capital is also in Madison so that you know the connection between government and the university was very very close on the same street basically. Obviously it's the Midwest City. It's one of the few places I think I could have lived in the Midwest happily since am very much a coastal person. But it's it

actually is a very progressive environment so in some ways it was very much like Seattle except that it was smaller and I think the makeup of the undergraduate student body was a bit different here. You know it's mostly still in state students, but there but we have a significant number of students from outside the state of Washington and they are from all over the state too. And Wisconsin it's really mostly students from Wisconsin and other adjacent states in the Midwest and at that point. This isn't true now but at that point there were fewer international students and so forth and I think in some ways probably the families of some of the students were more conservative but the students themselves weren't really. You know I was there once I did my graduate work between '77 and '82 and there were signs all over of many of the town of the various protests of the late 60s and early 70s and anti-Vietnam activity there is a lot of it out there. So the kind of immediate feel of the campuses were actually not that different. Much colder winters. That was a major difference.

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ARCHER: Demographic wise about the students would talk a lot about how diversified this department has become just in the sense of the instructors but also the students who are enrolling in these kind of classes in this department. Can you talk a little bit about what that evolution has looked like because you kind of got to witness it first hand?

HOWARD: Yeah. That's a good question. In the early years the faculty were almost entirely white women as you mentioned that is obviously changed over time and changed intentionally. I think we were slowest to really develop a presence of African-American studies and that was a real issue. Part of the reason was because the African-American population in Seattle is much smaller than it is in most urban areas. And so African-Americans have been less likely to want to

actually come to Seattle in some ways. I think that's changed some. And there obviously has for many many years been a strong African-American community. But I think the UW was not necessarily perceived as a particularly welcoming home. The faculty have begun to diversify I think in some ways. The reasons that student bodies begin to diversify is what we teach. And what our faculty do research on and I think that you know GWSS has always been a department that has really bent over backwards to become involved in any of the diversity related initiatives on campus and importantly also to connect ourselves with various communities off campus. And again you know now that's what everybody says is the right thing to do, but that was not true back then and there was actually I would say a real distrust in some disciplines of having too many connections with organizations of the city more generally. That's never been true of GWSS. So it was intentional. I also think the overall population student population at the University of Washington has diversified very much and that's been as I'm sure you know very very intentional. You know obviously the state legislative initiatives have made it difficult but hopefully that's going to reverse itself in this legislative session. But it's been intentional. I should also say there has over the years that a lot of activism on the part of the students the majors and GWSS to really push the department to do more in this regard. And that's very helpful for the department.

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ARCHER: I like your point about a lot of these things being intentional and a lot of them appear to be revolutionary, but they are very calculated and manipulated ways in doing so. Something that always comes up, especially, as I mentioned I study communications, but before that I was looking into Foster and all of these other programs and a lot of people were subconsciously swaying me away from Gender, Women, Sexuality Studies just because it's always the question- what do

you do with that degree? I was wondering- what are your thoughts on that, how do you combat that, clearly you're passionate.

HOWARD: Don't get me going on that one.

ARCHER: [Laughter] Me either!

HOWARD: I'd be interested to hear your thoughts as well. Some of this reflects ignorance and I don't use that term to, you know to, to make any negative comments about other people. But, there is its assumption that if you don't major in STEM fields or in business you won't get a job. And people typically don't look at the data when they say things like that and the data suggests that is not true. If you look at any studies on this you'll see if you look like 10 years out- it's not only having a job, but the kinds of salaries you earn, the kind of perks the kinds of positions you have, and the benefits that they offer are every bit as good for social science, humanities, arts, natural sciences, as they are for the you know some of the other engineering and computer science. For the fact I was talking to somebody recently who had heard Jeff Raikes who was a major figure at Microsoft who said people are really insane to be going into computer science right now. Artificial intelligence is actually going to replace virtually all of the human programming within the next 10 years and they're not going to have jobs and people are going to need the kinds of skills that we teach in social sciences. This is a very high up person at Microsoft. So that would be one answer to that question. And I think to that you know that GWSS the kinds of things you need when you're done, and this is I mean one of the things is so different about being a finishing college now as opposed to what it was when I did, is that people tended to have careers that they stayed in for most of their adult lives. That's not true anymore, when people move around and shift from position to position much more so what you need is

flexibility, you need the ability to analyze situations, you need critical thinking skills, you need the ability to work collaboratively in teams in positive kinds of ways, you need to know foreign languages- I mean there's so many things that you miss if you really have a very narrow major. And GWSS has been at the forefront of all of that. And in fact there was one of the students who got her PhD in the department, Karen Rosenberg who went on to the Writing Center at Bothell. She and I did a presentation at the sociology meetings and then wrote an article for signs that talked about the fact that a lot of things that were developed in feminist conversations at feminist departments then went on to be viewed as state of the art what everybody should be doing, but the feminist origins of them were not recognized and typical highly valued pedagogical techniques are a good example of that. So a lot of the things that happened in women's studies classrooms early on are now done routinely across the board and the feminist origins were not recognized. So I think anybody majoring in GWSS or minoring in GWSS, as you said you might, well come away with the kinds of skills and kinds of orientations that are really going to be valuable to you.

ARCHER: I agree with that. [Laughter]

HOWARD: Good. [Laughter]

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ARCHER: Because UW is such a STEM heavy school, coming into this university and working so heavily in these departments, how do you, from your perspective, in your role see that and combat it on it just a daily basis. I know as a student, I just hear it in passing and socially there's that stigma around it. But as an actual team member, do you still face that?

HOWARD: You don't face it directly as a family member. It's more exactly as what you were just saying that you want your students to have the freedom of choice to study what they want to study and to study what would be useful in the future and I'm not in any way saying STEM isn't useful, but but many of the STEM faculty themselves would say you also need a rich liberal arts background and you won't get some of the skills and some of the the more narrow STEM courses that you do need by the time you're going to graduate. So it doesn't really affect us as faculty and that I don't feel- you know there's no sort of oversight of our our teaching or our research that says you really shouldn't be doing what you're doing. It comes too indirectly and that more funding gets directed to STEM departments and that's more of an issue at higher administration. But it doesn't affect our daily lives in so much as it increases the worries we might have for our both our graduate and undergraduate students. So you know speaking of graduate students those who are going to get PhDs in gender studies I have the greatest admiration for their staff. That's actually a great job market because it's been an expanding field. That's not true of all the social sciences but it does take a degree of guts to just basically ignore those comments and I think also this is more true for undergraduates kind of holding off parents that say you know shouldn't you be going into more practical field? And the answer to that is no. This is practical and it's hard for some parents to believe that I think.

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ARCHER: Did you ever face that with your family at all?

HOWARD: No. No. No.

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ARCHER: What does your family do?

HOWARD: Well they're they're passed on now. My father was in aeronautical engineering and did a lot of budgetary related consulting toward the end of his career. My mother didn't have a career, although she was kind of a classic example of a certain generation that had she been 20 years younger she would've had a career. She went to Wellesley- didn't go on. After my sibling and I were both out of the home, she got a job at a well-known stock firm, stock and investing firm, was editing the oil bulletin within six months which says something about her talents and then my father was actually paralyzed in an accident. She had to deal with that. She didn't do it but she's somebody that would have had a career had she been younger.

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ARCHER: Do you think that that kind of subconscious initiative translated into you and how you pursue your career?

HOWARD: That's a good question. I think, I guess what I would say is that probably their lives modeled for me that it would be good to have a career. Not my mother's life, but seeing what she gave up. But it wasn't particularly what that career would be I'd actually thought I went to Cornell as an undergraduate and then moved to New York City for a couple of years after which is not far from there. I thought I was going to go into elementary education and I took some courses at one of the colleges of education in the city and I taught kindergarten for a couple years and I got to see enough of the administration and the ways in which, this is a private school, that the way some of that was handled it sort of discouraged me from thinking I'd be able to teach the ways I wanted to. So I actually moved to the west coast and did a whole bunch of other things for quite a long time. So ending up in the academy was not something that had been my initial intention and I just kind

of came to it through other much more circumstantial kinds of things. So it wasn't as if I mean some people get into the academy knowing forever that that's what they wanted to do and they don't take any time off after their undergraduate work go on to get their PHD and move on. I had eight years in between. So by the time it came to this it was something I knew I really wanted but it wasn't like a lifelong goal.

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ARCHER: For the GWSS Department and I think this goes across the board, not just UW specific there has been such an evolution in the department and the ways it is viewed. What can students who are in the department now be doing and actively thinking about to continue on that evolution so that we stay on that same track.

HOWARD: You know. I'm not sure from quite understanding the question but it has been my perception that as long as I've been connected to the department the undergraduates have always been involved with various actions going on on campus. So there's always some connection with departments like American Ethnic Studies, American Indian Studies, CHID and they've been connected to various of the kind of larger efforts of students to express what they think should the university should be doing. GWSS students have always been in the heart of that and I think that's, that kind of effort should continue because that's how you really know how might you do institutional change. Get involved in ASUW, you know it's a maybe a simple thing to do but I have been tremendously impressed by the professionalism the students I've met through that organization. And I think that's how you kind of get connected to other things going on both on campus and the city more generally and thereby push the faculty to support them. I don't know if that's still going on but I assume it is.

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ARCHER: [Laughter] Yeah, I can attest. What specifically sparked your interest? For me personally, going into GWSS and deciding I want to minor in it and study it more intensely was kind of a random parallel thing. I didn't come to the University of Washington thinking GWSS was for me I didn't even really know it was an option for me. It was more like "girl power" yeah, that seems on brand. But then more and more they study the more I realized that I was drawn to it because of the dynamic of the classroom and that we were teaching empathetic listening and learning and I liked the kind of conversations that we were invited to have whereas a lot of the other classes I was taking kind of shut down a lot of the students whereas GWSS was one of the first times I felt like it was truly an inclusive environment. What kind of stemmed your process for deciding that GWSS with something that you wanted to look into more heavily and focus as an area of interest?

HOWARD: That's a hard question and it's hard in part because the field has changed so much over these last two years. I mean I think I got my I did get my PHD in 82 and that was a long time ago and when I was earning- so let me go back a little before that actually when I said that I moved to the west coast so I lived in Eugene from many of the 70s and there wasn't a women's studies, it wasn't an actual academic program although they offered a few courses, but Eugene being what it is was a very active feminist community. These were the early years. So you know it was a community I knew and participated in but I wasn't doing other things. It wasn't in the academy at that point. By the time I got to Madison, there, now was a big, seems so conservative now, but it was it was certainly a major organization at that point. There were beginning to be critiques from lesbian organizations have now and the more conventional feminist organizations and actions but it had feminism began to be a movement that really was in the national news and that kind of

coincided with news obviously not accidentally with the development of academic programs at Wisconsin and various organizations and when I got to the point of deciding when I was going to do a PHD on, I'm a social psychologist I taken a number of classes in Psych as well, that was at exactly the moment where a lot of rape crisis centers began to develop. And so I actually volunteered for a year and a half I was working on my dissertation at rape relief which is Madison's version of the main rape crisis center. And although the dissertation wasn't actually based on that it was really critical from informing my interpretations of some of the experiments that I did that had to do with attribution to blame about sexual and non-sexual assaults. And I did that very deliberately to sort of be immersed in a real world environment in which the same issues were actually happening is what I was studying for my dissertation. And that clearly connected with what women's studies was doing at that time. And actually this is kind of interesting- the first course that had ever been offered lesbianism that was offered while it was a graduate student and more than half of the class were graduate students who were hungry for something like this was not offered in any of our disciplines. And the people that took that class and went with one of them who I mean this was a Madison one of them went on to become the person who was now the Dean of our college of Environment here. Another went on to become. The. Provost at Cornell and then now the president actually then became chancellor of the Wisconsin system and is now the President of Amherst. So we're talking some pretty significant people and people are hungry for it. And that was was offered at Madison. And it really, you know it obviously, it led to a recognition that this is a field that could really offer really important work and treat it academically not just like a quote-unquote social issue that it was both of those that they were really closely intertwined, and so that was very formative for me. So, I have often wondered if anything ever happened to this. It was my last year or probably next to last year in graduate school a bunch of us through their women's studies

department and some other local organizations formed something that we very, I don't know what the right word for it is but with a great deal of chutzpah called the National Lesbian Feminist Organization and created and organized what we called the National Conference that was held in Milwaukee. Now I don't know if anybody from outside the state of Wisconsin actually came to that but it was bringing together organizations and local groups across the state in Chicago that were doing work that was at that point perceived as very very very out you know out there in that part of the mainstream. So it was all powerful stuff.

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ARCHER: I like what you're saying about students being hungry for certain subjects that weren't previously offered and we discuss actually in our class the other day especially with the example of trans studies, those classes fill up instantly because they haven't been there before. Is there a subject or an area that you wish that we were having classes in, what do you think the students are hungry for? That we're not otherwise getting?

HOWARD: Well you would know that much better than I do, you should tell me. [Laughter] Yeah, trans classes are a great example of that. I know some of the graduate students here in sociology have taken Amanda's courses because there's nothing like that offered here. You know I don't really know. I think, you know we certainly have people in the department who offer courses on transnational feminism's and people who do a lot of work on migrations and you know the dire consequences of some of the current migration crisis'. I think was something and I don't know if there's a hunger for this I hope there is that I think something that links climate change and human migrations would be really great because so so much of the kind of migration activity we see now as it is impelled by climate change dynamics in some of the gang activity and some of the Central American

countries is in part because of the droughts and the floods and things that are ruining people's livelihoods and particularly here in the Northwest. I mean I'm sure you've heard many people say Seattle is really going to be a very popular destination for climate change migration and I think GWSS would be a department very well positioned to do more with that. We offer some of it but we don't have people that do environmental work as much on climate change. I think that would be wonderful. But I don't know. I assume students very interested in that.

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ARCHER: Yeah. See, I think that's one of those topics that people don't realize that they're not thinking it about until it's in their face and they have the opportunity to think about it. That's also one of the reasons I kind of drew into GWSS as a department in the first place as I feel like a lot of the subjects that were invited to study are subjects that affect so many individuals and the majority of society just doesn't even realize that it is even a factor in someone's daily life. What are some of those kinds of factors that you see there is so prevalent and if there is any remedy or solution that we can kind of work towards as a department or as individual students to just aid in, we talked. Earlier in class about just the use of pronouns how simple that is to institutionalize and re-institutionalize and be able to add that to more of a systemic flow. Are there any just minor minor in the sense that, a majority of the society overlooks that, not minor in the sense that it affects individuals that anything similar to that that you see from your perspective that we can be combating?

HOWARD: I'm not sure how this would translate to concrete steps but one thing that I think is very very true about the academy and about many academic disciplines is the classism that underlies so much of what we do. You know, a number of my close

friends in graduate school had come from a very working class backgrounds and they were the first in their families to go to college let alone to graduate school. And you sort of see it when you just watch people interrupted academic conferences. This is less true of NWSA but you still see it there. And I I don't know, I think this country in particular has been less inclined to and perhaps even less capable of really studying socio economic differences and recognizing them or calling them out for what they are. And I don't really, I'm not sure I could answer right now how that translates into daily practice in the department, but I think more that we could do to make GWSS classrooms and space in general not just welcoming of people from different class backgrounds but starting with what that experience is and bringing it into the classroom in a pretty profound way. I don't know if you've read a book by Tara Westover called Educated. It's an incredible book and she was actually just here at Seattle Arts at a lecture Sunday night and I had read the book before hearing her speak. Home schooled in a way by a family that is described in the book as Mormon, but it's not the Mormonism that's the issue it's the father's mental illness. And they lived in a extremely poor very rural part of Idaho and were supposedly home schooled and she didn't realize until she began to find ways through unbelievable efforts to educate herself how little she actually had been schooled at all. She went on to go to Harvard. She did graduate work at Cambridge and you're thinking "what must the classism of those institutions have been like for her to experience?" And that's kind of what I'm talking about. It's just the assumptions we make about people do and don't know that are really deeply inscribed by the backgrounds we've had. And I don't think we do anywhere near enough in the Academy to recognize that what to recognize what it's like for somebody who hasn't set foot on a college campus before to have that opportunity and to not feel terrified by it. And I think GWSS in particular is a department that would be very very well positioned politically to do that. So, but that's just one that's just one possible dynamic.

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ARCHER: So kind of wrapping up in close. What advice or just from your experience what do you want students who maybe are in this department, maybe are being discouraged by being in a STEM based school. Are facing like those individual battles, a lot of these students identify a lot with the studies that we are practicing. What would you share with them having gone through that whole evolution and watching the process of the department.

HOWARD: You know one of the things I love about the department is the majors virtually every year are really close to each other and form a tight unit. And I think that's critical because what you want to do is continue those relationships and that support after you leave. And I think supporting each other in making a choice like this and recognizing how important that the work that we teach and do research on in the department how critical that is for you individually but also for the world is really important. So I think if there's any advice it's trust yourself trust your instincts, trust the fact that you made this choice. Several times in this interview described the UW as a STEM based school and I wouldn't describe it that way and I'm just I'm discouraged that you do. [Laughter] Because that says something about how other communities describe it. And I don't think of it that way at all. But I would encourage you to not describe it that way and to think about it is I mean it's an excellent institution, as I'm sure you know and we're excellent in many many fields. We've got you know nursing social work or both top three schools, some of our departments in social sciences are top five top ten. You know we have all kinds of really great programs that are not STEM related and we teach STEM skills in many of those departments. So it's I think is just trusting your choice and having faith in and supporting each other.

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ARCHER: If you were to kind of reword that rhetoric how would you describe the university?

HOWARD: I think the University of Washington is a truly excellent very diverse research based public institution. I think the public mission is critical to everything we do here. I think the research base is critical to everything we do here and I think most people have gotten over this view. There used to be a time when people really saw research and teaching as sort of antithetical to each other. I don't think that's true anymore so that the excellence of the scholarship we have here also provides an excellent educational experience with the students and more and more students both undergraduate and graduate are involved in the research that we do. I mean we are excellent. So many different fields are classics department is often the number one in the country- you know who knows these things? So I really would describe it as a diverse very high quality institution of excellence across the liberal arts but also across other fields.

ARCHER: I love that. [Laughter]

HOWARD: And I do.

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ARCHER: I think that's a perfect note to close on. Do you have any other additional things that you would like to share?

HOWARD: Now I don't know if we'll be seeing this but I would just say that I really applaud you and all of your fellow students for pursuing this work for staying the field for learning the techniques and hopefully for doing relevant work after you leave college making a difference.

ARCHER: Thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us today.

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