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Gloria Steinem's speech "Moving Beyond Words" at Ford Hall Forum transcript

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Ford Hall Forum: Transcript of Gloria Steinem Forum

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Speakers: Gloria Steinem, Sally Jackson

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Recording Summary:

Transcription of a Ford Hall Forum that featured Gloria Steinem, an American feminist, journalist and co-founder of *Ms.* magazine. Steinem reads excerpts from her book *Moving Beyond Words* and discusses the state of the women's movement and offers possibilities for the future, focusing on such issues as economic empowerment, women politicians, and life affirmations.

Transcript Begins

SALLY JACKSON: Good evening and welcome to the Ford Hall Forum. I'm Sally Jackson and I'll be your moderator for this evening. Introducing Gloria Steinem is a daunting task, what to leave in, what to leave out. Let me speak directly to the women in this audience under the age of 30. If you are not at this moment worrying about your typing speed, you have Gloria Steinem to thank.

(laughter and applause)

[00:00:33]

When you look in the newspaper for a job and there is no section called, "Help Wanted: Female," you have Gloria Steinem to thank.

(applause)

If considering law school, medical school or the Supreme Court seem possible, you have Gloria Steinem to thank.

(applause)

[00:00:54]

She has been instrumental in helping to change not just how we're treated and thought of and how we're paid but how we feel about ourselves. Through her writings, her speaking, her creating *Ms.* magazine, and perhaps most of all her example, she has helped make us all who we are today, more enlightened, confident, liberated, and wiser women and men. Gloria Steinem is the author of several books including *Revolution from Within*, a book on self-esteem, and the just published and available for sale this evening, *Moving Beyond Words*.

I am truly delighted to present Gloria Steinem.

(applause)

[00:01:54]

GLORIA STEINEM: It's true that I'm of the generation that was supposed to learn how to type. And I was so worried that I would end up typing that I made it a point not to learn how to type, which has penalized me ever since. So you see, whether we conform or fight it, the "it" is still the problem until we humanize or overthrow it. Depending on the state of your patience this evening you can pick your verb. It's nice to hear that our presence in the world has been noticed or makes a difference. But we also know that a movement is only composed of people moving.

And though the absence of any one of us in this room would change the world profoundly, in my absence the movement would go right on. It is populist. It is about our lives. It is about justice, the future, looking at the world as if everyone mattered, overthrowing a few little things like patriarchy, racism, hierarchy, monotheism, a few little things like that.

[00:03:02]

And thanks to your generosity of spirit in taking time out of your busy lives tonight to take a chance on a stranger. Although I must say I don't feel like a stranger. I bet a lot of us has been in the same room before or in the same march or in the same something. How many of us have been together before?

That's a kind of perfect proportion, you know. That's about, I don't know maybe a fifth. So that means there are old friends but there are also new friends. So we're expanding at the same time.

But anyway, thanks to your generosity in spending this time we have something very precious, which is an hour or so in this room together. So here's my plan. If everything goes well each of us, me included, will leave here with one new fact, one new feeling of support, a sense of community, revolutionary colleagues, subversive organizing idea. And in order to make that happen we can only do it together.

[00:04:21]

So I hope that during what is usually called the question and answer period you will feel quite okay about not just asking questions but also giving us answers, we could all use some, about making organizing announcements of upcoming trouble-making meetings you think this group should know about, saying where the bodies are buried locally. If you'd rather not say it in public, just pass me a note. I'm self-employed. I'll say anything.

(laughter)

And truly to turn this into an organizing meeting. If we're here we share values in some way. It's a chance for us to not just have a discussion but on the way out look around and see two or three people you don't know, introduce yourselves, say what you're doing, what you care about. You could leave here with a new job, a new friend, a new love affair. Anything could happen.

[00:05:25]

And selfishly I look forward most of all to that period because it gets—it means that I learn something. I just came from Washington, which was the first city on my book tour. And I learned from audiences there everything from the fact that women had put together a softball team called the Outrageous Acts, average age 44.4 years, and perfectly dignified women came up and said, “I play second base”, to the fact that there is a 40-day hunger strike in progress to eliminate—to get the government to eliminate the School of the Americas, which is the place where, as you probably know, foreign police forces and intelligence forces are trained, often in torture and in very undemocratic techniques.

And these women are courageously out there in an, to me, unpublicized hunger strike trying to make sure that our government finally eliminates this school, which is responsible not only for many of the atrocities in Latin America but also for training the very police force in Haiti that we are now trying to oust. So think what we could learn from each other.

[00:06:54]

I'm going to—this is supposed to be partly reading and partly lecture. So I'm going to read from this book at the beginning, at the end—and at the end and speak extemporaneously in between. The first thing that I'd like to read to you is a little portion if—of, “What If Freud Were Phyllis?”

which is going to be a challenge to the signers. And then I'd like to talk about the other—some of the other parts of that essay. Then a few other new ideas, or there's no new idea on earth but growing ideas. And then a reading at the end.

(reading from her book *Moving Beyond Words*)

It's important to understand that when Phyllis Freud was growing up in Vienna, women were considered superior because of their ability to give birth. From the family parlor to the great matriarchal institutions of politics and religion, this was a uniform belief.

Though she was a genius who was to tower above all others in enlightenment she was of course a product of her time. Women's superior position in society was so easily mistaken for an immutable fact of life that males had developed exaggerated versions of such inevitable but now somewhat diminished conditions as womb envy. Indeed, these beliefs in women's natural right to dominate were the very pillars of Western matriarchal civilization, impossible to weaken without endangering the whole edifice.

[00:08:40]

At the drop of a hat wise women would explain that while men might dabble imitatively in the arts they could never become truly great painters, sculptors, musicians, poets or anything else that demanded originality for they lacked a womb, the very source of originality.

(laughter)

I should tell you that everything in here is real. It's just reversed. There's not a word here that he didn't say and you'll find the real quotes in the footnotes.

[00:09:09]

Similarly, since men had only odd, castrated breasts, which created no sustenance, they might become family cooks, provided they followed recipes, of course. But certainly could never become great chefs, vintners, herbalists, nutritionists, or anything else that required a flare for food, a knowledge of nutrition or an instinct for gustatory nuance.

And because childbirth caused women to use the medical system more than men did—

—True, of course. I hope that the Clinton remembers this.

[00:09:41]

Making childbirth its natural focus there was little point in encouraging young men to become physicians, surgeons, researchers, or anything other than nurses and other, low-paid healthcare helpers.

Even designing their own clothes could be left to men only at risk of repetitive results. When allowed to dress themselves they seldom could get beyond an envy of wombs and female genitals, which restricted them to an endless succession of female sexual symbols. Thus the open button-to-neck V of men's jackets was a well-known recapitulation of the V of the female genitalia. The knot in men's ties replicated the clitoris while the long ends of the tie were clearly meant to represent the labia. As for men's bow ties they were the clitoris erecta in all its glory.

(laughter)

All these were, to use Phyllis Freud's technical term, representations.

Now just in case you think I made these up I want to read you a Freudian quote. “In her unconscious envy of the penis many a woman adorns herself with feathers, sequins, furs, glistening silver and gold ornaments that hang down in what psychoanalysts call representations of the penis.”

[00:11:01]

And here's—and here are some things that Freud said were phallic symbols: “sticks, umbrellas, posts, trees, objects which share with the thing they represent the characteristic of penetrating into the body and injuring. Thus sharp weapons of every kind, knives, daggers, spears, sabers, but also firearms, rifles, pistols, revolvers, water taps, watering cans, fountains, pencils, pen holders, nail files, hammers, the remarkable characteristic of the male organ, which enables it to rise up in defiance of the laws of gravity”—(laughter)—“leads to its being represented symbolically by balloons, flying machines,”—(laughter)—“and most recently zeppelin airships.”

[00:11:58]

Back to the—back to Phyllis.

Of course one can understand why men would not choose to replicate their own symbols, chicken necks, bits of rope, dumb bells, cigarillos, spring potatoes, kumquats, belfries and the like. But instead would choose to admire the glories of cathedrals, stadia, and mammoth caves, the ocean, the sky and other representations of the womb as well as to replicate the exquisite jewel of the clitoris in ties that were the only interesting feature of male dress.

Nonetheless, you can also understand why stylish husbands of the well-to do or wife-hunting young bachelors of the upper classes preferred to be dressed by talented female designers. Clearly men's imitateness did not include modesty however. On the contrary.

As Phyllis Freud was to write decades later in "Masculinity," her great synthesis of a lifetime of learning about her male patients, quote, "The effect of womb envy has a share in the physical vanity of men since they are bound to value their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority." Unquote.

In addition, men's laugh—lack of firsthand experience with birth and nonbirth—with choosing between existence and nonexistence, conception and contraception, as women must do so wisely for all of their fertile years—severely inhibited their potential for developing a sense of justice and ethics. This tended to disqualify them as philosophers, whose purview was the "to be or not be" issue, the deepest question of existence versus nonexistence.

Practically speaking, it also lessened men's ability to make life-and-death judgments, which explained their absence from decision-making positions in the judiciary, law enforcement, the military, and other such professions.

Finally, as Phyllis Freud's clinical findings showed, males were inclined towards meanness and backbiting, the inevitable result of having been cut off from the coveted sources of life and fulfillment to which their mates had such ready access within their own bodies.

[00:14:19]

As she wrote, "The fact that men must be regarded as having little sense of justice is no doubt related to the predominance of envy in their mental life for the demand for justice is a modification of envy and lays down the conditions subject to which one can put envy aside."

After life-giving wombs and sustenance-giving breasts, women's ability to menstruate was the most obvious proof of their superiority. Only women could bleed without injury or death; only they rose from the gore each month like phoenix, only their—

(laughter)

—only their bodies were in tune with the ululations of the universe and the timing of the tides. Without this innate lunar cycle, how could men have a sense of time, tides, space, seasons, movement of the universe, or the ability to measure anything at all?

(laughter)

How could men mistress the skills of measurement necessary for mathematics, engineering, architecture, surveying, and so many other professions? In Christian churches, how could males, lacking monthly evidence of Her death and resurrection, serve the Daughter of the Goddess? In Judaism, how could they honor the Matriarch without the symbol of Her sacrifice recorded in the Old Ovariment? Thus—

(laughter)

—thus insensible to the movements of the planets and the turning of the universe, how could men become astronomers, naturalists, scientists—or much of anything at all?

[00:16:01]

Of course men are sexually passive just—are passive sexually just as they tend to be intellectually and ethically. After all, the libido is intrinsically feminine, or, as Phyllis Freud put it with her genius, “man is possessed of a weaker sexual instinct.”

This also proved—was also proved by man’s mono-orgasmic nature. No serious authority disputed the fact the females, being multiorgasmic, were better adapted to pleasure and thus were natural sexual aggressors. In fact, “envelopment,” the legal term for intercourse, was an expression of this active/passive understanding. It was also acted out in microcosm in the act of conception itself. Consider these indisputable facts of life: The large ovum expends no energy, waits for the sperm to seek out its own destruction in typically masculine and masochistic fashion—(laughter)—and then simply envelops this infinitesimal orgas—organism. As the sperm disappears into the ovum, it is literally eaten alive—much like the male spider being eaten by his mate. Even the most quixotic male liberationist will have to agree that biology leaves no room for doubt about intrinsic female dominance.

[00:17:28]

What intrigued Freud was not these well-known biological facts, however, but their psychological significance: for instance, the ways in which males were rendered incurably narcissistic, anxious, and fragile by having their genitals perched so precariously and visibly exposed on the outside of their bodies.

(laughter)

Though the great Greek philosopher Aristotelia had been cruel to say—(laughter)—that men were simply mutilated women, men’s wombleness and loss of all but vestigial breasts and odd, useless nipples were the end of a long evolutionary journey toward the sole functions of sperm production, sperm carrying, and sperm delivery. Women did all the rest of reproduction. Thus it was female behavior and psychology that governed gestation and birth. Since time immemorial, this disproportionate reproductive influence had unbalanced the power of the sexes in favor of women.

[00:18:33]

Finally there was the unavoidable psycholog—physiological fact of the penis. Its very existence confirmed the initial bisexuality of all humans. All life begins as female in the womb as elsewhere—which was the only explanation, of course, for men’s residual nipples—and penile tissue had its origin in the same genital nub, and thus retained a comparable number of nerve endings as the clitoris. But somewhere along the evolutionary line, the penis had acquired a double function: excretion of urine and sperm delivery. Indeed, during the male’s feminine, masturbatory, clitoral stage of development before young boys had seen female genitals and realized—

I mean he really said all this stuff. I’m just reversing. Okay.

—And realized that their penises were endangered and grotesque compared to the compact, well-protected, aesthetically perfect clitoris—it had a third, albeit immature, function of masturbatory pleasure. All this resulted in an organ suffering from functional overload. The most—

(laughter)

[00:19:45]

The most obvious, painful, diurnal, nocturnal, indeed even multi-diurnal and multi-nocturnal result for this residual, clitoral tissue of the penis was clear. Men were forced to urinate through their clitorises. No doubt this was the evolutionary cause for the grotesque enlargement and exposure of the penis and for its resulting insensitivity and unfortunate appearance.

(laughter)

Though the nerve endings in the female clitoris remained exquisitely sensitive and close to the surface, carefully carried as they were in delicate mucous membranes, which were cushioned and cradled by the labia. The exposed penial versions of the same nerve endings had gradually become encased in a deadening epidermis, a fact that deprived men of the intense, radiating whole-body pleasure that only a clitoris could provide. Men’s diminished capacity for orgasm and lesser sex drive followed as day follows night.

[00:20:52]

It was almost as if Father Nature himself had paid “less careful attention” to the male. His unique and most distinctive organ had become confused. Was the penis part of the reproductive system or the urinary tract? Was it intended for conception or excretion? How could males be trusted to understand the difference?

(laughter)

As a result of this functional confusion, plus what even the enlightened Phyllis Freud had to admit were, quote, disgusting, unquote genital results the penis was the constant subject of rude names and cruel jokes. Even in dignified, professional meetings, when Phyllis Freud reported on some newly discovered psychological implication of this unfortunate functional overlap, there was often laughter that would have offended delicate male sensibilities had any males been present. Inevitably, distinguished women would rise to pay tribute to the clitoris as the only human organ dedicated solely to sexual pleasure—

True, you know.

—an argument for female superiority that was as old as time.

Nature’s necessity of spacing births was a final dictator of the male role. As Phyllis Freud reasoned so brilliantly, since insemination and pregnancy could not accompany every orgasm, experienced by multi-orgasmic females, it must also be the case for males that sexual maturity could be measured by their ability to reach climax in a non-procreative way.

Female centrality was clear. Thus male adaptability must be equality clear. Male sexuality became mature only when pleasure was transferred from the penis, which was desensitized and rendered unpleasant by its dual function any way—to the mature and appropriate areas: the fingers and the tongue. Immature penile orgasms had to be replaced by mature lingual and digital ones.

[00:23:01]

In her ovarian essay, "Masculinity," Phyllis Freud was clear. In the clitoral phase of boys the penis is the leading erotogenic zone. But it is not going to remain so. The penis should hand over its sensitivity and at the same time its importance to the lingual, digital areas.

And I say in a footnote that if you think that I'm being cruel to men I would submit that we have allowed in this reversal more nerve endings to men than Freud allowed to us by telling us that orgasms were entirely vaginal where there are almost no nerve endings.

As for birth control itself, Freud opposed it—

Which he did.

After all, if men were mature enough to achieve lingual, digital orgasm, birth control was unnecessary. If a woman wished to conceive a child, birth control was insurrectionary. With her characteristic generosity, however, Phyllis Freud held to the belief that some new form of contraception could be invented that would not produce neurosis.

[00:24:09]

Sigmund Freud did believe that all forms of birth control produced neurosis, not to mention that masturbation was the source of all addiction and produced neurosis. But cocaine use was just fine.

(laughter)

It was this willingness to explore, experiment and theorize about experiences so different from her own and to seek scientific justification for the social order as it does and must exist, that was to distinguish Phyllis Freud's work throughout her long and much honored life. Thus we find her late in her career still pondering with fascination the sexual life of the adult man, which remained to our intrepid explorer something of a dark continent.

[00:24:58]

This is all, of course, about empathy. Phyllis Freud was invented in order to speak to the American Psychiatric Association, as I was invited to do on the subject, as the women psychoanalysts wanted me to speak, about the sexual abuse of patients by their analysts. And I was so worried about being stoned to death by the APA that I invented Phyllis Freud as a means of striving for empathy, to try to ask the audience to understand what it might be like, what it would feel like if a profession was 90 percent female and patients were 70 percent male. And the entire profession, as indeed much of the popular culture, was informed by the work of Phyllis Freud.

But I have noticed as I travel around talking about Phyllis Freud that while people are willing to laugh at Phyllis, although sometimes they get angry at me for doing this, there is more of a reluctance to take on what you will find as the story of the footnotes—which became a narrative in themselves called “The Watergate of the Western World.” Because the basic question is, first of all, why did Freud become so popular here when he was not popular in Europe in the same way?

[00:26:41]

And I think the answer for which we all must take responsibility was and is that the religious support for the caste systems of sex and race and for hierarchy itself was not working any more. And he came along with this pseudoscientific secular support for the power structure as it exists. But the second question in addition to our responsibility for this is how did he get to be such a crazy guy?

Well, I think that the papers recently revealed, only in the past few years, his letters that Jeffrey Masson printed in the late eighties, which won Jeffrey Masson such hostility from the—much of the psychoanalytic community. They tell us, and there’s no reason not to believe him, that he was sexually abused and psychologically abused by his own parents. His father convinced him that if he touched his penis, if he masturbated, he would be subject to hysteria, neurosis and other extreme problems.

[00:28:08]

People tried to excuse this as if that was the belief of the time. Actually, it wasn't the complete belief of the time. But Freud used to get up and debate people who said that masturbation was harmless and the problem was just a bias against it. And also he says such things as, "Unfortunately, my father was one of those perverts who is responsible for the hysterical symptoms of my siblings," and also names a nurse whom he had before the age of three as someone who abused him.

This—these letters were written in the period of time in which he believed, or almost believed—was beginning to believe the patients who came to him, men and women, but especially women who had been abused and sexually abused as infants and little children. He was onto what we are just now learning. But to admit that, to admit it was real would have caused him to admit what had happened to him. And after his father's death he seems to have set about the long process, which he called his self-analysis, which he said was impossible for anybody else to do, of course, but he could do a self-analysis—

[00:29:38]

He was the only guy who never had any therapy of any sort—to deny and bury and suppress the facts of his own childhood.

As I see now the degree to which we are still trying to deny the reality of the extent and depth of child abuse, including sexual abuse, as I see the same impulse to deny rising up in non-existent phrases or non-existent syndromes like the false memory syndrome, which actually is just a name—each case has to be looked at separately but there is no such thing as the false memory syndrome. I understand again how deep the impulse is to say that this is not true of others. And therefore I don't have to believe it about, or remember it about my own past.

People sometimes ask me why I believe the prevalence of child abuse. Well, I think the evidence is there in the—in a constellation of symptoms that are physical, somatic memories of headaches, of bulimia, of interrupted sleep patterns of flashbacks to the scene itself, of everything that we know—but when they ask me this, why I believe the prevalence of child abuse I always say, because it didn't happen to me.

[00:31:32]

And for those of us who either have had the luck of an un-abused childhood or the ability to dig out those memories and realize how painful they were, how wrong they are and go through the long process of healing we, I think, have a special responsibility and a special gift to believe the evidence before us and to try to end this abuse in the next few generations. Sometimes I think that the only form of arms control is how we raise our children. Because we'll go on killing each other with something as long as we raise children with violence and they come to believe that violence is the way we solve problems.

So I hope that while we're laughing at this bit of satire, we will also look at its reverberations in daily life now and consider that, for instance, we know from cases of child abuse that were documented in hospitals and in reliable ways, extreme child abuse, that now that those same children have grown into adulthood, 30 percent of them don't remember it, have buried it. And though it is still governing their lives it is to frightening to dig out and to look at.

[00:33:30]

It's a very—it's controversial now. It's heated up now. It's not to say that we believe everything but that we look at each case individually and we keep open minds and open hearts. You know, the McMartin case—remember the McMartin case in California? Which was the longest trial in the history of the nation, seven years, about the use—the sexual abuse of the children in this preschool and their use in pornographic films and so on—that was what the children alleged. As the prosecution attorney said, the jury found the family, or the accused perpetrators innocent she thought, because they simply found the reality too hard to believe.

Now the tunnels beneath the preschool, which the children reported as the way they were taken out of the preschool without knowledge of the neighborhood, have been excavated and verified.

[00:34:39]

I'm not trying to convict people here who have been exonerated by a court. But I do think that we need to be open and aware of the abuse of children including ourselves and people around us,

as a root cause of why prostitutes are prostitutes and many men are in prison and others enjoy close-up torture because they themselves were tortured as children and identify with the aggressor since it's too painful to identify with the victim. That to just be open and to look at the abuse of children as the cause of many of the unexplained ills we see around us. We can read Alice Miller. We can read Judith Herman. We can read many authors who have great insight and experience into this.

There's another essay here in this book of six, long essays, which is sort of more like six short books or six condensed books. They're sort of like powdered milk, you know. If you poured water on any one of them it would become a book.

[00:36:10]

I didn't intend for it to become this kind of book which has no genre. I thought it was just going to be a collection of previously published essays, refrying the beans, as writers say. But as you can see, Phyllis, which was meant to be this little five-page riff, turned into something quite different. And the book itself turned into one that is mostly original writing.

But I noticed that the essay about which I am asked the least is one called "Revaluing Economics." I hoped that this essay might create contempt for economics and thus increase our ability to feel unintimidated by it and to understand it and to begin to change it. Because though I started out in a very, or perhaps because I started out on this journey in a very simple way, which was that I was trying to explain to reporters in the middle of the Carter administration—Remember Carter? Anyone?—why it was that the Women's Commission had been fired by him. Headed by Bella Abzug and so on.

[00:37:31]

The Women's Commission had dared to analyze not just expenditures on child care and other women's concerns but the entire federal budget. And the Carter people got angry and they fired the Women's Commission. So we were explaining why it was that this had been done, and I kept saying to the reporters that the National Budget was the only statement of values this country

ever makes. And therefore each of us, as citizens, has the right and the duty to look at the values that that budget represents.

Well, after saying this a few times, I realized that if that was true it was also true that my own budget was the only statement of values I ever made. And so I took out my checkbook with that in mind and looked at the checkbook stubs to see what—how they would represent my values if I were to be hit by a Mack truck tomorrow. And I wasn't very pleased. I mean I like to think that I put my money where my beliefs are but I wasn't happy.

[00:38:41]

And ever since then I've been following—they say follow the money, that's true. But more than that follow the values. And it ended in this essay, which is challenging the idea that the economy is an objective report on what is—on supply and demand, and on what is scarce and so on. And saying, no, it isn't that at all. It is a bias statement of what is valuable and what is not. The census decides what is visible. The National System of Accounts [System of National Accounts], which is an international accounting system, decides what is valuable. And we must challenge both of those minotaurs at the heart of the economic maze.

Because together they are declaring all—most productive in the work in the world invisible, that is all the work that's done in the home, whether by men or by women, but mostly by women has no economic value whatsoever. In third world countries water that's carried in jars on women's heads from the well has no economic value. But if it comes through pipes it has an economic value.

[00:40:05]

We know how much it costs to replace a homemaker's services but her services have no imputed value in the budget nor do—nor does the work of reproduction and nurturing have any value. And it doesn't have to be like this. I mean there are a lot of challenges to this system, especially in the third world, so called. We can challenge it here where it was invented.

In addition the environment is not valued. A tree that's standing out there giving you oxygen has absolutely not economic value whatsoever. But when it's cut down it acquires one. We're never going to save the environment unless cutting down trees is seen as asset depletion and not just a source of profit, which is what is—the way it's seen now.

So I hope that you might look at this—you know, I realize the reason nobody asks me about this piece is the deadly word “economics.” It sort of makes you—and as an economics-impaired person—(laughter)—I have tried, I have tried to produce an essay for other economics-impaired people because it is the heart of the wrong values that we are trying to change. And we have to have a healthy lack of respect for it if we are to seize control of it and change.

The last essay is called, “Doing Sixty.” It started out as the introduction but it wouldn't stay that way. And it's really an account of one more woman. I'm sure there are many women in the audience who can also testify to this, of becoming more radical with age. You know people, reporters and sociologists look at high schools and colleges and young workers. And if they don't find the red hot center of feminist activism there, though there are more young, courageous, activist feminists than there ever were before. But if they don't find the center there they think it isn't there.

[00:42:36]

Well, it's always been the case that women's pattern of activism has been the reverse of men's. I don't mean everybody, but just as a general, cultural pattern. Probably all the men in this room are exceptions to what I am saying. But women tend to be more conservative when we're young and grow steadily more radical as we get older. And men tend to be rebellious and active and radical when they're young and grown more conservative as they get older.

If young women have a problem it's only that we think there's no problem when we're young. We haven't yet experienced the great radicalizing events of a woman's life, getting into the labor force, having children, discovering who cares for them and who doesn't, having two jobs instead of one and so on. And also young women have more social power as—at eighteen or twenty than they will when they're fifty. Whereas men are the other way around.

[00:43:35]

So I have recognized this pattern intellectually long ago. But I hadn't realized that I was subject to it, too. And I've only just begun to realize, after fifty, which was—fifty was sort of like leaving this long, familiar country called the female role. Whether you conforming to it or fighting it you're still aware of it. And it last from twelve to fifty more or less or thirteen to fifty. So when I turned fifty I felt as if I was leaving something. And I responded to this with my favorite emotion, which was defiance. I'm going to go right on doing everything I did when I was thirty or forty, so there.

But, in fact, as I realized by the time I was about fifty-five, this is not progress. This is not going forward. And at sixty I began to feel that I was entering a new country. There are no maps for this country. We are invisible. Women over sixty-five are the single, poorest demographic group in the nation.

[00:44:49]

But intrinsically, this stage of life, which exists for all of us, men too, for, in a much greater, critical mass for the first time. I mean people over—people are living thirty-five years longer in this nation than they did in nineteen hundred. We're like a new species. This period, for women especially, off the patriarchal family map is scary but it is free. It's sort of like going back—remember when you were a little girl of eight or nine or ten. And you were this kind of shit-free, clear-eyed creature and you were climbing trees and you knew what you wanted and what you thought and everything. And then at about eleven or twelve or thirteen you started to become a female impersonator and, you know—

(laughter)

And then—well, it's sort of like going back to the clear-eyed eight or nine or ten year old little girl. Except now you're a grown up. You're independent. You have your own apartment, maybe. So this is my account of some of the things that I've begun to realize. And this will be my last reading here before—it's brief—before we start our organizing meeting.

[00:46:07]

(reading an excerpt from her book *Moving Beyond Words*)

I'm just beginning to realize the upcoming pleasures of being a nothing-to-lose, take-no-shit older woman, of looking at what once seemed outer limits as just road signs. For instance, I used to take pleasure in going to a feminist Seder every year, subverting that ancient ceremony by including women in it. In our women's segata [?] we honored not only Deborah, Ruth and other heroines of the Bible but also our own fore mothers. "Why have our mothers on this night been bitter," we read together, "because they did the preparation but not the ritual. They did the serving but not the conducting. They read of their fathers but not of their mothers."

Lately however, I've been wondering why start with anything that must be so changed, so fought against? Why not begin with the occasions of our own lives and create the ceremony we need for births or marriages, adopting friends as chosen family or setting off on a new adventure.

[00:47:09]

Having learned the pleasures of ritual I'm thinking of founding a service called Ceremonies-To-Go. I used to pass urban slums or rows of poor houses anywhere and compulsively imagine myself living there. What would it be like? It was a question of such fearsome childhood power that I only recently realized it had fallen away. It's simply gone. The deep groove worn by such imaginings has finally been filled by years of words written and deeds done, crises survived and friends who became family, work done for others and thus an interdependence. In other words, I no longer fear ending up where I began.

I used to indulge the mag—in magical thinking when problems seemed insurmountable. Often this focused on men for they seemed to be the only ones with power to intercede with the gods. Now it has been so long since I fantasized a magical rescue that I can barely remember the intensity of the longing. Instead, I feel my own strength, take pleasure in the company of mortals and no longer believe in gods except those in each one of us.

[00:48:25]

I used to think that continuing my past sex life was the height of radicalism. After all, women too old for childbearing were supposed to be too old for sex. And becoming a pioneer dirty old lady, seemed a worthwhile goal—

(laughter)

—which it was for a while.

But continuing the past, even out of defiance is very different from advancing. Now I think, why not take advantage of the hormonal changes age provides to clear our minds, sharpen our senses and free whole areas of our brains. Even as I celebrate past pleasures I wonder, did I sometimes confuse sex with aerobics?

(laughter)

[00:49:07]

I used to be one of the majority of Americans whose greatest fear was dependency in old age, a fear that must have roots other than economic. For it is no more prevalent among women or the racial groups of men most likely to be poor. Then I listened to historian Gerda Lerner question that fear among a group of middle-aged women. As she pointed out, we don't fear dependency in the early years of life. On the contrary we understand that being able to help children find what they need can be a gift in itself.

Why shouldn't we feel the same about the other end of life? Why shouldn't the equally natural needs of age be an opportunity for others to give? Why indeed? Now I wonder if women's fear of dependency doesn't stem from our being too much depended upon. Perhaps if we equalize the caretaking and the giving with men and with society this will bring us a new freedom to receive.

I used to think that uprooting negative childhood patterns was an activity reserved for individuals. Now I wonder if this familiar healing process wouldn't benefit countries and races, too.

[00:50:25]

In the country in which we live there is a glorification of violence and a willful denial of how much violence hurts. I wonder if we're collectively doomed to keep repeating these violent patterns until we admit the hurt that took place in this nation's childhood, the reality of genocide that wiped out millions of indigenous peoples and all but destroyed dozens of major cultures. Plus the still only half-admitted realities of slavery and its legacy within each one of us.

I'm happy about the new Holocaust museum in Washington for I know our government refused to admit thousands of Jews until it was too late. But we also need to have a Native American museum which finally admits that the so-called uninhabited Americas were actually home to as many people as Europe. And a Middle Passage museum to memorialize the beginning of the massive injustice of slavery that is still playing itself out.

[00:51:28]

We need this remembrance not for guilt or for punishment, which only creates more of the same, but to root out the patterns of our national childhood.

I used to think that nationalism was the only game in town, the most radical act was to support poor countries in their rights against rich ones. Now I look at artificial boundaries, lines that can stop no current of air or polluted river and mourn the violence lavished on defending them. Long ago, in times suspiciously set aside as pre-history we were mostly nomadic peoples who claimed nothing but crisscrossing migratory paths. Cultures were the richest where different peoples and paths were the most intermingled.

We're still a nomadic species. We move and travel on this earth more than we ever have before. Yet we insist on the destructive fiction of nationalism, one that becomes even more dangerous when it joins with religions that try to create nations in the sky.

[00:52:36]

Lest all this seem too impractical, let me add one more contrast between the old and now. I used to think that I would be rewarded for good behavior. Therefore, if I wasn't understood I must not be understandable. If I wasn't successful I must try harder. If something was wrong it was my

fault. More and more I see that context is all. When someone judges me, anyone or anything, I ask compared to what? When I see on television a series about children of divorce for instance, I find myself asking, what about a series on children of marriage.

When a women fears the punishment that comes from calling herself a feminist I ask, will you be so unpunished if you don't? When I fear conflict and condemnations for acting a certain way I think, what peace or praise will I get if I don't? I recommend the freedom that comes from asking, "Compared to what?" Hierarchical systems, all of them prevail by making us feel inadequate whatever we do so we will internalize the blame. But once we realize that there is no such thing as adequacy it sets us free to say we might as well be who we really are.

[00:54:02]

I've always had two or more tracks running in my head. The pleasurable one was thinking forward to some future scene, imagining what should be, planning on the edge of fantasy. The other played underneath with all too-realistic fragments of what I should have done. There it was in perfect microcosm, the past and the future coming together to squeeze out the present, which is the only time in which we can be fully alive.

The blessing of what I think of as the last third or more of life, since I plan to reach 100, is that these past and future tracks have gradually dimmed until they are rarely heard. More and more there is only the full, glorious, alive-in-the-moment, don't-give-a-damn-yet-caring-for-everything sense of the right now.

I was about to end this with, there's no second like the next one. I can't wait to see what happens. And that remains true. But this new state of mind would have none of it. There is no second like this one.

Thank you.

(applause)

[00:55:54]

SALLY JACKSON: While people are gaining their courage, let me ask you a question. One of the chapters in the book talks about when you took advertising away from *Ms.* magazine. What's the situation now? How's that working?

GLORIA STEINEM: Oh, well, I'm happy to—(coughs)—excuse me I'm still getting over the flu here—I'm happy to say that probably due to the support of people in this room *Ms.* magazine is doing better without advertising than it ever did with advertising.

(applause)

It's actually, you know, it's actually making money and was able last year to give some money back to the movement, which has always been our dream to do.

[00:56:25]

I do think that we need to look at especially women's—at all of the media—but especially women's magazines for the influence of advertising and understand that beauty products won't advertise unless they are praised in the pages of women's magazines, and their little diagrams of where to put your rouge and so on. And food won't advertise unless there are recipes and clothing won't advertise unless there's endless praise of fashion. And that's why women's magazines look the way they look.

But we pick them up and I fear that we're made to be contemptuous of each other because we think that even though we don't want all this stuff, somebody wants this stuff. Well, the somebody are the—is the advertisers. And yes there's—we must be equally aware of the influence elsewhere but there's a difference. If *Time* or *Newsweek* attacks an advertiser or a kind of product they may lose that advertiser for a period of time.

[00:57:23]

In women's magazines, if you fail to praise it, you don't get the ads in the first place. And that's why they're such catalogues. Think of what we could do with the thousands of pages if they were free, if the—if there was a true separation between advertising and editorial.

SALLY JACKSON: Sir.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I wondered if Phyllis Freud isn't more serious than you even think. As I understand it anthropologists aren't sure what the function of males is, at least in the primate world except to provide diversity. Females—males consume more resources than they produce in general. But—and a female world would in fact be better off in almost every way than with males. But males are aggressive. They try for dominance. In other words, there is a—they do something that is not necessarily useful but, in fact, creates the world that we have. They engage in war.

[00:58:24]

Do you see any way for the feminist movement to be sustained in the presence of a world of war?

GLORIA STEINEM: I guess I have a more cheerful view about males than you—

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But wars do occur. And the males cause them.

GLORIA STEINEM: What you say is true. I would only say that it is culturally true not necessarily biologically unchangeably true.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It happens in the primate world. And the gorillas and the chimpanzees, they parallel humans.

[00:58:59]

GLORIA STEINEM: Well, the—you can always tell what somebody thinks by the animals they choose to study. Do you know what I mean? Lionel Tiger, you know, is not a friend because he is only studying chimps in captivity where they behave quite different from in the wild. And somebody who studies elephants who are vegetarian and peaceful and matriarchal and so on, you know, is a whole different guy, so I—and also, we do have a cerebral cortex. We are the one

animal that exper—influences our own evolution by changing circumstances, adapting to the circumstance, changing them again and so on.

There are societies in the world—I mean if, you know, if it were biological there would be no societies in which this wasn't true. But there are tribal societies in which there is not war for territory or institutionalized violence. And the one, shared characteristic of those societies is that the gender roles are not polarized. Men are not taught that they have to be in control or aggressive or even violent in order to be men. And women are not taught we have to support violence, be passive, supportive and so on in order to be women.

[01:00:17]

So I mean Olof Palme, the great prime minister of—late prime minister of Sweden always said that it was the most important task of every government in the world to humanize and do away with gender roles because they were the root cause of violence.

(applause)

SALLY JACKSON: Your question?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Since you and I are in the same room for the first time this may sound naïve. When I walked in I was amazed to see so few men here. And I'm wondering if that's typical of your presentations and if so, why.

[01:00:58]

GLORIA STEINEM: Well, I think maybe there are something like a third of audience is men. What do you think? Can you tell from—Twenty percent, twenty-five, a fourth to a third—

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Ten.

GLORIA STEINEM: Ten.

(laughter)

[01:01:14]

SALLY JACKSON: And yet they were the first three questions.

GLORIA STEINEM: That's because the women know the answers.

(laughter and applause)

GLORIA STEINEM: No I realize, you know, what you say is true. Although I have found in general that there are more men in audiences than there used to be. And—but just as there need to be men in audiences to hear women just as there need to be white people in audiences to hear speakers of color. You know, I mean we have to realize that we all have to gain by this. I guess the ideal audience that I've discovered to date is a third men and two-thirds women. Because if an audience is half and half the women are less likely to actually stand up and say what they are really thinking. They're sort of worried about hurting the men's feelings or how they're going to respond or something.

[01:02:17]

But if it's about a third, then women will still talk and the men get to hear women telling the truth which is part of the education. So—but it is interesting that it's always, even if there are a few men, it's always men who ask questions first. I think it's harder for women just to get up and hear our own voices and, you know, speak out. But next time bring some friends.

(laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, I don't have all the answers. I was wondering if you would comment on the future of the women's movement as you see it.

[01:02:55]

GLORIA STEINEM: Oh. That's like, describe the universe and give two examples. Right, right? Well, it's—the future is in our hearts. It depends on what we want it to be. I guess it's helpful to look, to take a sort of birds eye view and remember that the first wave in this young country lasted a hundred and fifty years and gained a legal identity for women of all races as

human beings. So we shouldn't be surprised that this wave is going to last a hundred years at least to get a legal and social equality for women as human beings.

We're only about twenty-five years into it. Those twenty-five years have built a majority support for all the basic issues. Consciousness has really changed. And we've begun to change the structures, but just begun. And we have a backlash because we've changed the majority consciousness. So I think where we are is fighting the backlash, which is inevitable, and having the courage to look forward, you know, to envision, because otherwise we can't create what we can't envision, new structures. New structures. I mean, you know, if—it's terribly important that men raise children as much as women do.

[01:04:23]

The country now understands that women can do what men can do. But we haven't yet demonstrated the men can do what women can do. So women have two jobs. And kids grow up not knowing that men can be loving and nurturing just like women can and then they divide themselves up. Yet we don't have changed work patterns for the parents of little children. Both men and women. I mean that's just one of, you know, there are hundreds of examples of the ways in which the structure hasn't yet changed to make our dreams real possibilities for most people. So structural change I think is the order of the day.

SALLY JACKSON: Yes?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah. My question is, how did you overcome the inertia initially of needing to be pleasant in a society and what keeps you going?

(laughter)

[01:05:21]

GLORIA STEINEM: I don't think I've overcome it, actually. I mean I would come back to the magazine—the *Ms.* Magazine office having done some television thing and the young interns who had this much better shit detector than me would say, “Why do you smile all the time? What you're saying is serious. You don't have to”—I would say, “You're right. But what can I tell

you. I was a fifties person, of Doris Day, you know. So, you know, you just—you struggle with it, actually. You struggle with it. And it changes in increments.

And it changes from having support. Maybe that's the most important thing, not to try to do it by yourself. But to have a group of women or—and/or supportive men who you meet with once a week so you can find out you're not crazy, the system is crazy. That makes the difference.

SALLY JACKSON: This just handed me. Only two more questions and yours is next.

[01:06:18]

GLORIA STEINEM: I'll answer shorter. I promise. Maybe we could do everybody standing up. Could we do everybody standing up?

SALLY JACKSON: Sure.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: To be on the reverse end of it, I don't want to strive to be unpleasant but what I'm finding as a younger member of the audience in my own life is there is what you talk about a lot, this notion that if I say, "I'm a feminist," people think I'm man hating. People think I'm all sorts of terrible things. So I'm striving right now to know what your answer is to the question, what can I do to make feminism more palatable to my peers.

GLORIA STEINEM: Well, I think the first thing, I'm not trying to tell you what to do because only you know. But the first thing may be to say, "I'm a feminist." Because then people who love you will begin to think differently about feminism.

[01:07:06]

It's not—the thing is that it's so unusual to be pro-woman and it's so unusual to be pro-black or pro, you know whatever the racial group that it's perceived as being anti-male. Because the maleness is supposed to have this kind of support. And whiteness is supposed to have this kind of support. But it isn't. We're talking about fifty-fifty. So just remember that the problem is in the ear of the hearer not yours. And ask yourself the question, compared to what. You know,

what is life going to be like if you don't say you're a feminist. You're more likely to acquire support if—and people who are—who share values if you do say so. And you'll change it. You'll change minds all around you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Thank you.

SALLY JACKSON: Quickly,

[01:07:59]

AMY RICHARDS: I have an organizing announcement, which is to introduce or re-introduce to some people the Third Wave. And I think it's very appropriate for this audience, which seems to be filled with young women. And maybe answers that question, which you just asked, which is one of the problems is that women, a lot of young women feel alone. And the answer is to come together. And one great way to come together is through the Third Wave, which is a membership organization for young women, a national organization devoted to activism.

GLORIA STEINEM: The next meeting is?

AMY RICHARDS: Well, the next meeting—you can see me afterwards and I'll give you more details. Or I'll put these next to where Gloria will be signing books. Thank you.

[01:08:33]

GLORIA STEINEM: And this is Amy Richards who is the parent of this book, almost as much as me. I mean she's been working with me and living through this book. And the Third Wave is the organization that lasts a summer, a summer before last ran a voter registration. They in the spirit of Freedom Summer 1964, they did another Freedom Summer and young men and women feminists piled into buses and crisscrossed the country registering voters in poor neighborhoods. I mean, you know, so they do great work.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: In this recent program where young girls are being taken to work by their mothers, and being someone who used to hate feminism and only very recently realizing

that I was very unliberated—I also saw with these children that what they were gaining. One of the girls said that she could now learn how to carve her own future. That this was something that was a piece that was missing from me in whole life.

Now I'm grown and I don't have someone to take me to work and I'm looking for remedial—a remedial program.

(laughter)

[01:09:49]

GLORIA STEINEM: That's great. That's great. Well, you know, pick out the area you're interested in and just say to somebody you know or can find, you know, "I'm looking for a remedial program. How about taking an older daughter to work or a sister. Take a sister to work.

The Take-A-Daughter-To-Work Program has been great. The Ms. Foundation for Women started this last year and it just—

(applause)

—it just caught on. It just is amazing. And it's all in other countries now. And I do want to assure you because the one question we always get is, "What about sons?" Though I still think that if it were a program for African-Americans nobody would rise up and say, "What about white people?"

[01:10:35]

But we have always created curriculums on the work of caring, for instance, for—in the last two years for boys. And six million classrooms had these curriculums. I mean we are also thinking about the boys. Maybe we should have a Take-Our-Sons-Home-Day.

(laughter and applause)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, many people are amazed by your youthful appearance and wondering how you keep it up. And what I'm wondering is how you feel about cosmetic surgery and estrogen treatment and how you feel men relate to this.

GLORIA STEINEM: To cosmetic surgery?

[01:11:15]

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Right.

GLORIA STEINEM: Yeah. Well, speaking for myself I couldn't bring myself, I don't think, to have cosmetic surgery and I'm not having estrogen treatment because I had breast cancer and you're not supposed to have—I had a very minor, so far, experience with breast cancer. But you're not supposed to have estrogen treatment. By saying those two things I'm not trying to say, I'm not trying to pass judgement at all on women who choose to do this. We all have many different forces in our lives.

As for men, men are now a third of all cosmetic surgery patients, though I think that that also counts hair transplants.

(laughter)

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (inaudible)—Influence on trying to deter age. That's what I meant, more the men's influence on the women.

[01:12:05]

GLORIA STEINEM: Oh, well, men's influence on women in trying to conceal age. It's both individual, real male pressure and imagined social expectations. Sometimes I think women might be surprised if they just said their age and looked at their—as their real selves and discovered that men love them as they are. Sometimes it really is, seems, feels necessary to keep a job, to keep a marriage, to keep a social standing.

But I do think that if we were, if all of us who are lying about our ages were to tell our ages, our idea of what fifty or sixty or seventy looks like would change overnight. I mean I have met women who are successfully lying their ages, five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. Twenty years. There was a—there's a case I report in the book about a woman in—who went to Israel for a—

what's it called, when you implant a fetus in a woman's body and she gives birth even though she is beyond child bearing age. She lied and said she was in her forties and she was really in her sixties, and she gave birth.

[01:13:24]

You know, if we were to tell our real ages even doctors would be shocked. So I hope that we might consider the great gift that the gay movement has given us in this phrase, coming out. It's such a wonderful paradigm of honesty and risk and truth. And just consider as much as we can telling the truth, about—whether it's about our ages, how we really feel, what we fear, what we hope, whatever it is. Take the risk. Nobody will ever know if we don't tell them. They can't read our minds.

SALLY JACKSON: And the last question or comment.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Yeah, I was wondering about what you mentioned about early childhood education. I agree that it's a very important time to influence. But I was wondering, how do you—what is your philosophy about how to dialogue between the genders without the males feeling threatened and what is your answer to Robert Bly?

[01:14:36]

GLORIA STEINEM: Well, to start with Robert Bly first, because that's easier than child rearing. He does, Robert Bly does talk, does allow men to talk about how much they missed having loving and nurturing fathers. And that's very valuable I think. However, it seems to me retrograde to encourage men to talk about warrior status and so on. And also, when you see a group of men together and they're all white and heterosexual, you sort of know that something is not so great. As you know when you see a group of women together and they're all white or heterosexual it's not so great.

There are parts of the men's movement that are I think much more substantive by far than Robert Bly, who captured the media attention. But there are groups like the Oakland Men's Project, which has been together for 17 years I think, very diverse group of men, racially gay and straight

men. And they came together to try to help boys in the Oakland area have an image of masculinity that wasn't violent.

[01:15:50]

In the process they made a community of their own. You know, they're some of the few men I know who talk to each other the way women talk to each other. And they've been greatly helped by this. And their belief is that men's work is ending male violence against women but also against other men. And helping each other understand that this masculine box, you know, may be—that you're seeing in the man next to you—may be a prison for him, too.

It's a wonderful group and they're—I believe their doing programs in the Boston area. If you—I was about to offer you, say, write me and I'll write you back their address, which will drive Amy crazy if I—but it's listed, anyway, in Oakland, the Oakland Men's Project.

[01:16:40]

About child rearing I think there are two paradigms out there that are both wrong, that are both destructive. One is the right wing paradigm that says that children are little animals who need to be tamed. And this, which is often religious as well, justifies, it justifies physical, corporal punishment, psychological punishment. It can be very cruel. Then the more liberal paradigm is that children are blank slates on which you can write anything. And that's not true either. There is a person already in that baby. The question is how to help that person become who they already are. It's like a seed in a flower.

So if we take the cues from the child, you know, try to help the child become who they can be, instead of owning, possessing, controlling. That's the key to it. Because that makes you—the child know that she or he is lovable and good as they uniquely are. And they won't feel like they have to conceal some part of themselves in order to be loved. That's the key to it, I think. Children are fragile but children are incredibly durable, too.

And Alice Miller always says that if we—if a child has just one person in their life who loves them as they really are, a teacher, a cousin, a parent, somebody, that they have a chance. And we

can be that person because children belong to all of us. They don't have to be our biological children, right?

[01:18:20]

We can reach out to people we know who have children and who might, who could use a little extended family. The—there's the great African proverb, you know, that it takes a whole village to raise a child. We can be part of that village.

SALLY JACKSON: I hope you will join me in thanking Gloria Steinem for a wonderful evening.

(applause)

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