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## Review of A Politically Incorrect Feminist by Phyllis Chesler

### Abstract

Phyllis Chesler's new memoir, *A Politically Incorrect Feminist* (St. Martin's Press, 2018), spans almost fifty years of second-wave feminism. She names 100s of women, both famous and virtually unknown today who took part in the awakening and growing women's movement, marching, sitting-in, writing and organizing since the 1960's. It is the personal life story of one of the earliest feminist authors and political activists of the second-wave, the author of *Women and Madness* and 17 other books. Chesler discusses major issues of the time and provides an insider's view of many of the feminism's most significant public events. This big book contains some surprises and revelations, and is likely to be controversial.

### Keywords

feminism, psychology, surrogacy, memoir second-wave, movement, New York, activists, scholars, theorists, United States

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**BOOK REVIEW:**  
**A POLITICALLY INCORRECT FEMINIST BY PHYLLIS CHESLER**

**Robert Brannon**

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**KEYWORDS**

Feminism, psychology, surrogacy, memoir, second-wave, movement, New York, activists, scholars, theorists, United States

**ABSTRACT**

Phyllis Chesler's new memoir, *A Politically Incorrect Feminist* (St. Martin's Press, 2018), spans almost fifty years of second-wave feminism. She names 100s of women, both famous and virtually unknown today who took part in the awakening and growing women's movement, marching, sitting-in, writing and organizing since the 1960's. It is the personal life story of one of the earliest feminist authors and political activists of the second-wave, the author of *Women and Madness* and 17 other books. Chesler discusses major issues of the time and provides an insider's view of many of the feminism's most significant public events. This big book contains some surprises and revelations, and is likely to be controversial.

No social movement in history changed American culture so profoundly as the feminist movement which re-emerged in the late 1960's and 1970's. Although this new memoir is not meant as a book of history, I consider it to be the most extensive, richly-detailed and lucidly-written account of that historic movement yet to appear in print. It adds significantly to valuable earlier feminist movement histories by Susan Brownmiller, Ruth Rosen, Barbara Love, Flora Davis, Marcia Cohen, Judith Hennessee, Gail Collins, Judith Hole, and Ellen Levine.

This is a big, rich, detailed, often surprising memoir that is several things at once: the personal life-trajectory of one of the early central leaders of feminism, a brief discussion of many of the key issues and concepts of the movement, and an inside look at many major meetings, conferences, and events. Most of all, however, it is a loving, honest, and informative celebration of hundreds of women, "*all the radical feminists who spent their salad years organizing, marching, sitting in, and writing articles and books that quite literally changed our world*" (p. 101). Hundreds of women's names are recorded here, each within a clear context. They include both well-known women and many who are now almost unknown, women in the U.S. and around the world. This memoir will be a treasure for serious historians of feminism, and for all students of modern American culture more generally.

## Personal Milestones

Dr. Phyllis Chesler describes life growing up in the 1950's in Brooklyn, at a time when women were invisible in professional occupations. As a young woman she worked as a secretary, a newspaper 'copy boy,' a singing waitress in fishnet stockings, a welfare investigator, and in a major brain research laboratory. She describes here only briefly the incredible life-changing ordeal that became the bedrock of her feminist awareness: a college romance, marriage to a handsome Muslim man (horrifying her Jewish parents), then a near-death experience of strict confinement and gendered seclusion (purdah) as an alien, rule-breaking American woman in Kabul, Afghanistan. These stunning events are all recounted in her award-winning book *An American Bride in Kabul* (2013).

Clear feminist insights begin to appear in an early diary that she kept in the 1960's. She describes two abortions, before and just after the nightmare of Kabul, both fetuses fathered by the same Afghan man. Her earliest form of feminist activism was helping many other women obtain abortions. "Barbara Joans and I passed the women along an underground railroad of doctors' names and locations" (p. 42).

Phyllis Chesler quite suddenly emerged as a national figure, at an American Psychology Association (APA) convention I attended in Miami in 1970, as second-wave feminism was erupting across the landscape of America. A young and determined woman, in high boots, long black hair flowing, strode to the plenary podium to demand "one million dollars in reparations, to women abused by the mental health profession" or alternately, to create and fund "a shelter for run-away wives" (p. 59). Psychiatrists in the audience began muttering... "penis envy." APA never paid a penny to help psychiatrically abused women, but the fiery young speaker was now internationally-known.

She began writing her most memorable book, *Women and Madness*, on the airplane home from Miami. It would become the first major work to confront the patriarchal world of mental hospitals, clinical psychology, and psychotherapy, exposing the profound contempt for women which then pervaded clinical practice.

The next year Chesler rocked the APA again with clear evidence that a number of male psychotherapists were seducing and sexually exploiting young female patients (p. 92-3). This revelation would later lead to changes in APA policies and changes in many state laws.

These bold speeches had made headlines around the world, and seven U.S. publishers made bids for *Women and Madness*. The hardback appeared in 1972, and a paperback version a year later. With no reviews expected in the hostile-to-feminism *New York Times*, its' rights were sold off for a pittance. Then a literary icon whom she did not know, the respected poet Adrienne Rich, published a long and glowing *NY Times Book Review*. Sales skyrocketed. *Women and Madness* ultimately sold 3.5 million copies, among the best-selling feminist books of all time, translated into seven languages including Chinese.

Still, as only a young Ph.D. in clinical psychology, she now had to begin a decades-long struggle for simple survival as a female college professor, in the male-dominated academic world in the early 70's.

The patriarchal academic order viewed women who were not working as secretaries as dangerous threats. We were hazed. We ran gauntlets of

disapproval. We were judged on our looks and on whether we were “women’s libbers” (p. 45).

She nonetheless, on an oppressively male-focused campus, pioneered one of the first Women’s Studies courses in the U.S., a rape-crisis service, a child-care center, and women’s self-defense classes. Students adored her, but her male colleagues were uniformly suspicious and hostile. She relates many episodes of being sexually pursued and harassed by senior, powerful males in academia.

Back then, like most young women, I was sexually harassed - by professors, employers, and strangers on street corners. And like others of my generation, I was bred to accept it, keep quiet about it, and blame myself if something about these peculiar arrangements bothered me” (p. 162). None of these men “were overcome with love for me. They treated me as they did because I was a woman. It was nothing personal. Prejudice rarely is (p. 163).

Growing rapidly in involvement in the women’s movement, she delivered her first public lecture on feminism in 1970. She joined a consciousness-raising group and bonded with poet Marge Piercy. Phyllis Chesler rapidly became one of the best-known feminist scholars, authors, thinkers, and activists in the world, eventually producing 18 books and countless chapters and articles.

In her late thirties, in the first of many violations of unwritten movement norms, she encountered some women’s criticism for deciding to give birth to her second husband’s child. “*You’re too important to our struggle to become a mother,*” close friend Kate Millet exclaimed to her (p. 173). Nonetheless, Chesler did deliver a son, Ariel, who would become a successful attorney, then judge, a proud male feminist and prolific writer on men’s vital role in non-sexist parenting. She eventually authored four thoughtful books on various issues of motherhood: *With Child* (1979), *Mothers On Trial* (1986), *Sacred Bond* (1988), and *Woman’s Inhumanity to Woman* (2002). She became a frequent speaker at the annual Protective Custodia Mothers Conferences, organized by Mo Hannah and NOMAS leader Barry Goldstein.

Chesler’s rape by a top U.N. diplomat, and subsequent betrayal by a former feminist friend and ally, is a sobering story, told in detail here for the first time in one sad and reflective chapter of this book.

In her mid-40’s, she consciously decided “to live only with women” (p. 243). She is today partnered with Susan Bender, an accomplished and supportive attorney-at-law.

### **Feminist Issues and Events**

At intervals throughout this personal story, there are brief but illuminating discussions of some of the central and controversial issues within feminism. We also read the inside stories of some of the major events of our movement.

We learn the background of the sensational protest at the Miss America Pageant in 1968, an inspired idea of Carol Hanisch and others of the Redstockings (the New York-based radical feminist group). This was the first public feminist confrontation of what we now term *female sexual objectification*. Women held up signs: “*Women Are People, Not Livestock,*” “*All Women Are Beautiful,*” “*Can Makeup*

*Cover the Wounds of Our Oppression?*” (p. 36). Not everyone... quite got it. On the televised evening news, David Brinkley chuckled and smirked to Huntley: “*Chet, the girls are burning their bras.*”

Having suffered under unbending fundamentalist patriarchy herself in Afghanistan, Chesler was horrified in 1970 by news of the mass public and repeated rapes of hundreds of Muslim women in Bangladesh. She later termed this nightmare “*gender cleansing*,” designed to drive the women to suicide, or being “honor-killed” by their own families (p. 77). Later in the mid-90’s, she tried, unsuccessfully, to interest other U.S. feminist leaders in rescuing thousands of cruelly oppressed women in Afghanistan (p. 77).

Visiting in England, Chesler was sickened to learn of how little girls aged nine to 14, often runaways from broken homes, were being seduced by pimps, gang-raped, drug-addicted, and forced into prostitution (p. 258) She later forced herself to read about serial killers who tortured and murdered prostituted women, “*the darkest reading I’ve ever done*” (p. 276).

Already seen as a major feminist intellectual and authority, Chesler was an invited keynote speaker at the historic Radical Feminist Speak-Out on Rape, in New York in 1971 (p. 69). After that speech, she received her first death threats.

Chesler was virtually the only feminist to attempt to assist poor Aileen Wuornos, a childhood sex-abuse victim, who became a homeless, prostituted woman. Wuornos finally killed several men and was eventually executed. Chesler argued the case for extending the battered-woman concept to include such cruelly prostituted women, “the unlucky scapegoats for violent and murderous men” (p. 270). As Andrea Dworkin observed (1994), “Phyllis Chesler stands up for real women in trouble, in pain, hurt by patriarchy’s cruel domination.”

Like the white Freedom Riders in 1964 who journeyed to the South to challenge segregation, Phyllis Chesler, accompanied by partner Susan and best-friend Merle Hoffman, traveled in the 1990’s to rural Southern Mississippi, to directly confront white racism, homophobia, and ugly misogyny. They had gone south to support Brenda and Wanda Henson at Camp Sister Spirit. The Hensons had been counseling battered women and rape victims, established free food banks and clothes-closets, and had close ties with the local black community. They had been faced with threatening phone calls, letters, bomb threats, and a mutilated puppy left on their mailbox. Riding through nighttime Mississippi darkness to the Camp, facing possible violence by either the Klan or local white police, Phyllis Chesler was holding a copy of Sojourner Truth’s “*Ain’t I a Woman?*” speech, and recalling a Diana Rivers novel about a “tribe of lesbian feminist warriors” (p. 274). Then, as if a blessing from some Goddess, Diana Rivers was waiting there herself at Camp Sister Spirit.

For a book with Gloria Steinem about *Wonder Woman* comics from the 1940’s, Chesler wrote about the actual pre-historic Amazons of central Asia, who battled hand-to-hand and on horseback with Homer’s celebrated manly Greek warriors. “Amazons are a young feminist’s dream fantasy,” she wrote... “I believe that knowing about Amazons, as both historical and mythological figures, strengthens women psychologically” (p. 95).

In 1979 the United Nations employed Chesler to plan an international feminist U.N. conference in Oslo, Norway. She then set out to identify “the most educated, prominent, and courageous feminists on every continent” (p. 199). With colleague

Barbara Joans she constructed a list of 500 women's names, then narrowed it down to 50. In July 1980 women from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, North America, and South America met in Norway. They included members of parliament, a former Prime Minister, and ambassadors. This meeting led to many further international collaborations among feminists.

In 1987 Chesler led the rising feminist opposition to "surrogacy," the modern contractual invention of hiring a poor woman to bear a child in her womb, until its birth, after that she loses all rights to the child, and cannot change her mind. In *Sacred Bond: The Legacy of Baby M.* (1988) she asserted the reproductive and custodial rights of *all* women. While most observers automatically sided with the wealthy, educated professional couple that had hired Mary Beth Whitehead, a poor woman of humble background, Chesler championed any birth mother's moral right to custody. Surrogate contracts have since been declared void and illegal in several states. However, a movement to legalize surrogacy is growing in the U.S.

A religious Jew, Chesler has struggled for women's equality within religious Judaism, described in depth in her book *Women of the Wall* (2002). She and her sisters, attempting to pray at the ancient Western Wall in Jerusalem, were the targets of metal chairs thrown by bearded Rabbis all in black. It was surely a wild scene, the devalued women confronting an oppressive authority, reminiscent of the black Ministers attacked while kneeling to pray in Birmingham, or Gandhi's heroic salt-march to the sea. In another book, *The New Anti-Semitism* (2003), she perceptively examines the international scope and complexity of anti-Semitism today, with many illuminating correspondences to white racism. Some thought it "politically incorrect" for observing that anti-Semitism now comes from the progressive left, as well as from the Islamic right and the neo-Nazi right.

Chesler's 1978 book *About Men* was among the first feminist works to discuss the harmful psychological effects on men of massively-available woman-abusing pornography. She proposed that the highly unrealistic, "idealized" "enjoyable rape" portrayals in so much pornography can make rape fantasies pleasurable to men, and contribute to the high levels of rapes of real women.

At the New York University (NYU) Law School's Conference on Pornography later that same year, she stood in solidarity beside Andrea Dworkin, who proclaimed that "Pornography is the propaganda of sexual terrorism" (*NY Times*, 1978). The gut-wrenching film "*Snuff*," reportedly filming the sexual murder of a real woman in South America "*where life is cheap*," had been picketed for weeks, in cold winter weather, by Chesler, Dworkin, Dorchen Leidholdt, Grace Paley, Susan Brownmiller, Barbara Deming, and hundreds of other women, igniting a feminist anti-pornography movement that continues today (Layden, 2010; Brannon, 1991, 2016, 2017; Brannon and Poran, 1996).

Few clinical psychologists ever publish *any* empirical research, and few academics in any field are still productive into their late seventies. Decades ago, Chesler had reported original research data in *Women and Madness*. Recently, with her deep and painful personal knowledge of women's powerlessness in most of the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, she has conducted new original research on "*honor killings*." Young women are being murdered there today by their own families, for flirting with a boy, not covering their heads, or refusing an early marriage to an elderly stranger. In *Islamic Gender Apartheid: Exposing a Veiled War Against Women* (2017), and in *A Family Conspiracy: Honor Killing* (2018) she reports a new statistical analysis of thousands of published *newspaper* notices of such

“femicides,” yielding many important findings. Her website [www.phyllis-chesler.com](http://www.phyllis-chesler.com) is a major source of information about hate-crimes against women.

### Women of the Feminist Movement

With all its’ substantive content, this book is most basically a remembrance, a celebration, of the innumerable women who have contributed to the world-changing emergence of feminism. Many of the names included here are little-known today, but come swiftly to mind once again in these pages, as “memories tumbling, like sweets from a jar:” *Pauline Bart, Alex Kates Shulman, Naomi Weisstein, Alice Walker, Shulamith Firestone, Eleanor Holmes Norton, Barbara Love, Norma Ramos, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Sonia Johnson, Kathie Sarachild, Letty Pogrebin, Vivian Gornick, Flo Kennedy, Dolores Alexander, Marlo Thomas, Catherine Stimpson, Sidney Abbott, Dorothy Riddle, Annette Brodsky, Paula Caplan, Florence Rush, Brenda Feigen, Ellen Frankfort, Jane O’Reilly, Leigh Marlowe, Elaine Stocker, Inge Broverman, Lucy Komisar, Judith Herman, Cindy Cisler, Simone de Beauvoir, Karla Jay, Carol Downer, Martha Shelley, Elizabeth Morgan...* and dozens of other feminist women in Britain, France, Italy, Austria, Japan, and Sweden.

Not discussed but named and acknowledged for their important and influential work are many other very notable feminists:

*Jessie Bernard, Nancy Henley, Anne Koedt, Joseph Pleck, Shere Hite, Audre Lord, Pat Mainardi, Janice Raymond, bell hooks, Pat Parker, Michelle Wallace, Maxine Hong Kingston, Bonnie Anderson, Carolyn Bird, Rosalyn Baxandall, Laura X, Ruby Rohrlich-Leavitt, Gerda Lerner, Joanna Russ, Ann Oakley, Eleanor Flexner, Roxanne-Dunbar-Ortiz, Dana Densmore, Barbara Ehrenreich,* and many more (pp. 301-304).

In the pages of this memoir, we remember again a “galaxy of feminist stars,” spanning forty years of second-wave feminism.

The lack of a name index in a big book so full of women’s movement history and names is unfortunate. There is also no bibliography, notes, or references. However, all of the women mentioned are very helpfully placed in some specific context, telling us the political issue, time, place, or particular event in which she was involved.

Although many women are mentioned only briefly, others are discussed in more detail, such as *Barbara Seaman* who co-founded the National Women’s Health Network. Chesler remembers her as: “generous with her time and resources. She turned no one away and would find just the right physician for any woman who asked, no matter where she lived. With a few exceptions, she thought the best of everyone” (p. 290).

*Merle Hoffman* is a close friend of Chesler and a colleague in many endeavors. Hoffman is the charismatic and erudite woman who founded and is CEO of America’s largest abortion providing service, a woman who “*Brought Abortion from the Back Alley to the Boardroom*” (Hoffman, 2012). She is also the long-time Editor of *On the Issues*, an admired and wide-ranging feminist magazine, now published on-line.

*Kathie Sarachild* of Redstockings, a major early advocate of consciousness-raising, is correctly remembered as the original source of two familiar and effective



proclamations of the movement: “*Sisterhood is Powerful*,” and “*The Personal is Political*.”

*Judy Chicago*, a creative, daring, and pugnacious feminist artist, became fascinated by all the women in the immense span of prehistory. She led a large collective of women artisans and herstoryers in creating an acclaimed embodiment of women’s herstory, *The Dinner Party*, now a popular permanent exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum.

Along with recognition, respect, and praise for so many women she knew, there are a few candid disclosures. *Jill Johnston*’s regrettable anti-Semitic comments are mentioned (p. 73). She nonetheless receives a warm and loving two-page tribute (p. 291).

Chesler personally respected and liked *Margaret Mead*, but had to confront Mead’s contention, at a debate in Cincinnati, that “*women want to be raped*” (p. 111). Mead may have absorbed rather too much Freudian psychology.

*Mary Daly* in Boston is revealed as a notoriously difficult, stubborn, uncompromising person (p. 126), with an especially dim view of all men. But she is unique, brave, brilliant, defiant, utterly immovable, an iconoclastic voice of dissent, an irritant within the patriarchal Catholic Church, and with a wickedly-funny wit.

A few other women are portrayed in particular depth, thoughtfulness, and detail. Chesler writes that

*Andrea Dworkin* was a daring thinker and consummate intellectual. We always and only talked about ideas... Andrea’s literary persona was that of an outlaw, but I knew her as someone who, like me, spent most of her waking hours thinking, reading, and writing (p. 286).

Chesler’s published review of Andrea’s novel *Mercy* was very effusive, and notably literary; Andrea replied, with “great dignity,” that “she wished to be buried with this review.”

Andrea Dworkin is, without question, a great writer, a writer’s writer, as “masterful” as Miller or Mailer... as gentle and world-weary as Baldwin; as much a troubadour on the literary high road as Whitman or Ginsburg or Kerouac; raw and rough and cynical and fierce; brave, heartbreakingly brave, like Leduc - except the truth is, Dworkin really has no predecessor (p. 286).

But Chesler, the clinical psychologist, had more to say, not all so positive and lyrical, about her old friend and frequent ally, this great, controversial, and unforgettable woman:

Like Kate Millet and Shulie Firestone, Andrea was a genius. Also like them, she was destructive, self-destructive, intense, demanding, paranoid, feared, despised, misunderstood - but also deeply admired and loved... Yes, of course we quarreled... but we always made up. I thought we had a privileged and rather tender relationship, and I cherished it despite the difficulties (p. 131).

I defended Andrea Dworkin against all comers. But I also experienced Andrea as a demanding, domineering figure. She experienced herself as fragile, wounded, and vulnerable... she demanded blind loyalty from her troops. Personally she was shy and insecure. She'd sometimes ask me to accompany her when she lectured (p. 142).

I believe that Chesler has captured here Andrea's passion, intellectual gifts, insightfulness, and personal complexities better than anyone else has done. I knew, talked, and worked with Andrea myself for a number of years, and can attest to these observations. In one poignant and poetic paragraph, which almost echoes the musical rhythms of Andrea's own special verbal style, Chesler recalls here:

Andrea, who knew how to make huge mountains out of tiny molehills; Andrea, who accused practically everyone of high crimes, never mere misdemeanors; Andrea, who obsessed about how cruelly she'd been treated by other feminists; Andrea, who left no injustice unscorned (p. 219).

*Kate Millet*, an especially close friend until the end of her life in 2017, is mentioned in this memoir more often than any other woman. Propelled by the fierce and creative brilliance of *Sexual Politics*, "Kate was the first among us to become famous. When it happened to me, I didn't know what had hit me. No one had ever taught me how to ride this tiger or how to safely dismount" (p. 115).

Chesler's loving and caring, but also candidly honest account of Kate Millet is heart-warming, and now a part of the historical record. At Kate Millet's Memorial Service, Chesler tenderly eulogized her:

You were many different Kates... You were the most cosmopolitan, the most continental, the most European identified of our feminist intellectuals (well, Andrea Dworkin was, too). You believed that ideas matter and that intellectuals must lay their bodies down for the sake of revolution... Although you attended marches, protests, press conferences, and sit-ins, you mainly read, wrote books, sculpted, painted, and tried to create a utopian community for lesbian artists... You were tireless, relentless, in trolling the dark side on behalf of women's freedom (pp.296-299).

Lovingly, but honestly, Kate Millet's growing mental illness is also acknowledged. "She couldn't be counted on to remain lucid at a press conference." On one dreadful occasion "She made no sense... and wouldn't stop rambling. Ultimately, to everyone's horror, she had to be physically removed from the stage" (p. 191).

But her worth far transcended her limitations. "The point is that Kate wrote, despite her mental illness; she never stopped working, even when other illnesses laid her low" (p. 192).

"Some of my dearest friends were demanding and difficult women. Would they say the same about me? Probably" (p. 154).

*Gloria Steinem* is American feminism's best-known, and undoubtedly most-beloved public figure. I myself have always admired, perhaps idolized Gloria Steinem, as indeed does almost everyone. She wrote very early (1970) and persuasively about *men's* stake in the goal of feminist social change; I and others were permanently influenced by that 1970 article, by her optimistic, long-range and gender-inclusive vision of a better future.

Phyllis Chesler was already an established feminist authority in the U.S. well before Gloria arrived on the New York scene. Gloria was at first viewed by some as a protegee of Betty Friedan, and the dynamic, abrasive, but effective politician Bella Abzug. (Bella Abzug was very similar in demographic background to Betty Friedan, but they were competitors, with very different personalities, and did not get along). Gloria Steinem, however, would soon become the best-known face and symbol of the women's movement.

Gloria was indefatigable. She attended theater and film premiers, art gallery openings, book parties" (and would) "hit the road in order to get candidates elected... bear the burden of getting a feminist magazine funded and of sitting at a thousand and one meetings" (p. 110). Gloria was "polite, genial, reserved" (p.108), "supremely talented...a tireless networker, capable of gladly suffering fools as she lectured everywhere, anywhere... not overly combative or sexual. Gloria did not look like an angry man-hating lesbian and did not sound like an ideologue (p. 226) She was also witty and charming ...someone who could preach Feminism 101 decade after decade, long after the rest of us had quit the stage in exhaustion or boredom (p. 225).

This amiable stability... also meant that she could be heard, which I thought was a great advantage (p. 108). Issues that other feminist pioneered - abortion, rape, sexual harassment, incest, domestic violence, women's economic, political, and social inequality - were made more visible, even acceptable, by her pleasant appearance, unflinching good humor, and Midwestern calm (p. 226)

"Neither of us was a lesbian, although it was a subject we sometimes discussed. We were both told, over and over, that lesbianism was either a more perfect form of feminism, or a form of excessive man-hating" (p. 70).

Chesler had applauded the founding of *Ms.* magazine and admired Gloria's inspiration, tenacity and success in keeping *Ms.* alive. "I favored it. I did not foresee how successful the first issue would be; how hard Gloria would have to work to keep it afloat" (p. 72). However, from her own more radical feminist perspective, Chesler now observes:

Over time, Gloria's brand of... feminism was increasingly less about violence against women and more about racism, prison reform, climate change, foreign "occupations," and nuclear war - all important issues but not exactly "on message" or likely to appeal to women of all political persuasions (p. 227).

The *Ms.* magazine brand prevailed, although it watered down radical feminism, kept rewriting second-wave feminist history" (with the result that) a handful of feminists could live well, remain in the public eye, and be able to support certain feminist causes and the Democratic party (p. 215).

There is a great deal of praise and appreciation of Gloria Steinem in this memoir. There are also some less flattering observations. I might have preferred that some of these be left out, *e.g.*, what appears to be speculation as to what another person was privately thinking. Nonetheless, this up-close account adds to our

understanding of a real flesh-and-blood woman, who has become an almost impossibly-idealized icon to so many of us.

### Reflections on A Wide-Ranging Memoir

This is not a history per se, meant to cover every meaningful person and event. But this memoir spans so many decades, and central figures of second-wave feminism, that it is *de facto* the most detailed account of much of that profound and world-changing social revolution. A very few additions would make it almost an up-to-date overview of feminism today. As women's history teacher and movement-historian, I would add only a few notes. Some other significant feminist movement figures would include:

*Ellen Pence*, an influential strategist against domestic violence; *Donna M. Hughes*, editor of the on-line scholarly journal *Dignity*; *Melissa Farley*, the leading researcher and authority on women's use in prostitution; and *Janice Raymond*, *Ann Simonton*, *Peggy Reeves Sanday*, *Jessica Neuwirth*, *Joanne Evansgardner*, *Sally Roesch Wagner*, and *Laura Lederer*.

Mainstream politics is not covered here, or any leaders of NOW since Betty Friedan. *Ellie Smeal* has been the most central and influential figure in NOW for decades and now heads *The Feminist Majority Foundation*.

A women's studies professor well-remembered by feminist men is Sharon Lord, who sponsored the first national Feminist Men's Conference in Nashville in 1975, which led in 1981 to the formal organizing of National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS,) the oldest and most explicitly-feminist men's network in the U.S. ([www.Nomas.org](http://www.Nomas.org)). Over two hundred women were recently named by NOMAS in the international on-line journal *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence* for Significant Contributions to Confronting Men's Violence (NOMAS, 2017).

A few women mentioned in this memoir would merit up-dated descriptions in a full movement history. *Catharine MacKinnon* is mentioned as co-author of the 1983 Minneapolis Ordinance against pornography, which was unsuccessful in the U.S. (but was partially adopted in Canada.) She is also however arguably the most *successful* of all feminist reformers of the modern era. MacKinnon devised the legal strategy which transformed sexual harassment from a *joke* in every issue of *Playboy* to a serious crime against women. She thus affected millions of women's lives and made today's *#MeToo* revolution a legal possibility.

*Diana Russell* receives here a well-deserved description. "She is one of the world's foremost experts on violence against women, especially sexual violence" (p. 130-31). There is a discussion of the *International Tribunal of Crimes Against Women* which Russell organized in Brussels in 1975; it was attended by Chesler and more than two thousand women from forty countries. As an empirical researcher, Dr. Russell also conducted the earliest careful and accurate study of rape prevalence in the adult female population published (1983, 1984).

*Dorchen Leidholdt* is mentioned for her activism in 1975 against *Snuff*. She remains today a central leader in opposing all forms of gender-based violence. Attorney Leidholdt heads the nation's largest legal services organization confronting domestic violence. She is a long-time leader in opposition to the sex industry, particularly the use of women and girls in prostitution and pornography.

Jo Freeman's textbook series, *Women: A Feminist Perspective*, now in its 5th edition, is the all-time best-selling text in the field of women's studies. Her very early feminist newsletter popularized the phrase "women's liberation," and she authored some of the most often quoted articles in *Ms.: The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, *Trashing*, and *The Bitch Manifesto* (by 'Joreen').

### **An Eventful and Historic Career**

Two of Phyllis Chesler's eighteen books, *The Death of Feminism* (2005) (a very misleading title, I think) and *Woman's Inhumanity to Woman* (2002) dismayed some other feminists, and seem to have estranged some former friends and allies. One former close friend told her "You are too dangerous to talk to. You are dangerous to the women's movement" (p. 224).

History records the little-remembered time in 1896 when the first-wave feminist movement virtually shunned and exiled its own brilliant, activist founder, Elizabeth Cady Stanton... for being too radical. Stanton had dared to do the unthinkable: She had publicly criticized the Church.

Phyllis Chesler's four-decade career spanning almost all of second-wave feminism has more than a few similarities to that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Both were dynamic founders of the women's movement but had other far-ranging concerns, involvements, and issues. Both spoke, published, and organized on behalf of women for decades, but refused ever to follow any movement party-line. As she has done before, Phyllis Chesler candidly lets the chips fall wherever they may, in this remarkable new feminist memoir.

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