

Against Identity Politics



by Phyllis Chesler

Dare I say it? Yes, I must. I am neither this nor that. I do not identify myself in terms of whom I have lived with or married. Only my actions and my writing speak for me. Based on my 21st century books and articles, you would know that I'm a Jew, a woman, and a feminist intellectual. But such designations can mean many things. Jews, women, feminists, and intellectuals do not necessarily agree on...anything.

I try to take each issue, one by one, and do not identify myself as a loyal member of a "side," a tribe, a political party, or a football team. Like Walt Whitman—like you—I contain multitudes; I try to continue evolving, adding topics, sometimes changing my views.

I do not understand the need to identify oneself as a victim—to live is to suffer. Yes? How we handle that is everything. Even less, do I understand the demand to identify myself as straight, lesbian, bisexual, or "queer." Those who identify as such, are often very different from each other, we are all so varied; reducing oneself to a "one size fits all" identity is socially, aesthetically, and politically suicidal.

Perhaps young or insecure people, or those without family, need to be part of a beefed-up, imaginary pack/team/support group. Woe to the one who breaks with the pack on whatever the party line may be.

Tell me: What do *you* think?