

Big Sister Is Watching

The dangers of being perceived as pro-Israel in online feminist spaces.

by Phyllis Chesler



Does Big Brother—or rather, Big Sister, never sleep? Is she always anonymously patrolling the internet and the airwaves at the ready to attack, accuse, bully, defame and correct anyone who pronounces, however briefly, certain forbidden words and ideas?

The response I recently provoked with a few brief, innocuous and mildly sympathetic words about Israel was enough to convince me that the answer is yes. Big Sister is watching and listening. Who knows how much of what appears online is a performance in order to avoid provoking these censors and their gendarme, the internet mob.

A few weeks ago, I was privileged to be [interviewed](#) by Meghan Murphy, a young and radical Canadian feminist at *Feminist Current*. The podcast lasts 55 rather wonderful minutes. Murphy is a true Fourth Wave torchbearer and I am thrilled to be in touch with her.

We covered many issues, including the disappearance of radical feminist knowledge; the unprecedented opening in history that Second Wave feminists had—the likes of which has not been seen since; what being alive at that moment meant to me as an intellectual; the three tributaries that constitute the Second Wave (civil rights, left-inspired activism, and the feminist transformation of the professions); the importance of universalist values as opposed to relativist values; campaigns opposing pornography, prostitution, and trafficking; the embarrassment that women's studies has become; how the best and brightest minds of my feminist generation were quickly out of print and out of mind; the faux-feminist prioritizing of Sharia law and race over sex/gender; the nature of femicide; the danger of jihad; the extent to which the obsession with the transgender issue has not only erased women's issues but may also constitute one of the many faces of male backlash; how radical feminists have been attacked and death threatened when they share a view of the transgender phenomenon as diversionary and minor; the balkanization of identity; the way in which intersectionality is increasingly used to bludgeon radical feminist ideas; the danger of conformity and cowardice in the face of totalitarian regimes; the importance of tolerating, even celebrating, different points of view; the ways in which politically "incorrect" ideas are being boycotted and censored; and the issues that cry out for feminist analysis and support such as FGM, polygamy, child marriage, honor based violence, honor killing, and the burqa.

On a whim, when I revisited the site, I noticed, to my surprise, that there were 93 comments and counting. That's impressive given that only 737 people are "counted" as having listened. Alright, it's all good. Murphy and I drew an active group of listeners.

But then I started reading the comments. Around 65 percent by my count were about something I'd said in passing at two different times and for a total time of less than one minute

on the podcast.

I had said that I'd been "accused" of being too "positive about Israel" (although I said nothing further about Israel) and that I'd noted a "rise in ethnic bigotry towards the Jewish people in general, and among some feminists too."

Thus, I spent less than one minute on these two points, over and against 54 minutes of an intense, feminist conversation. It is important to note that the audience here is primarily a feminist one. However, only 27 percent of these comments were about feminist and gender issues; and 6 percent praised (or critiqued) the conversation. Some defended my right to speak, no matter what I had to say.

But the loudest, most vocal, and most vicious comments spouted blood libels about Jews and Israel. One must assume that such Judeophobic poisoned propaganda has fully infiltrated the feminist discourse. This is certainly the case when you realize who the American National Women's Studies Association honors ([Angela Davis](#)